THE Nation.

GITMO TRIALS RIGGED
Ross Tuttle

RETURN TO VIETNAM
Tom Hayden

IRAN'S IRAQ WAR
Robert Dreyfuss

CHÁVEZ'S FIX

IS VENEZUELA'S PRESIDENT UNDOING HIS COUNTRY'S EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY?

DANIEL WILKINSON

MARCH 10, 2008
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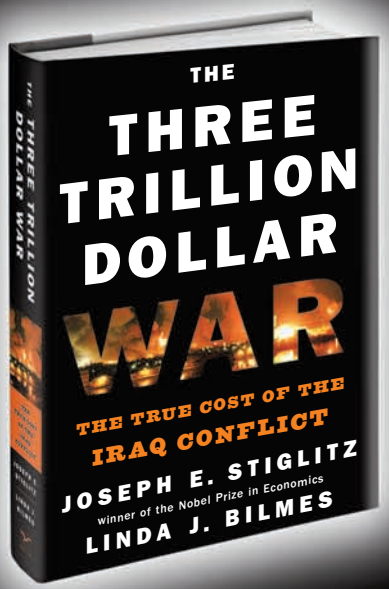
"An important and historic study."*

by JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ
winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics
and LINDA J. BILMES


THE
THREE TRILLION DOLLAR WAR
THE TRUE COST OF THE IRAQ CONFLICT
JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ
winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics
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"This is a catalog the Bush team never looked at. It's a catalog that they still don't want you to see." —James Galbraith, chair, Economists for Peace and Security

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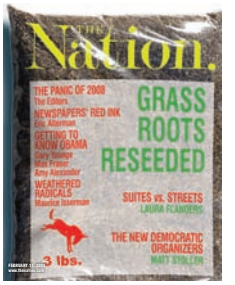

Obama & the $ubprimers

Cambridge, Mass.
Thanks to Max Fraser for his fact-based "Subprime Obama" [Feb. 11]. Most progressives have been seduced by Barack Obama's charisma. But his voting record, his proposals on bread-and-butter issues and his list of economic advisers demonstrate that he is a centrist. As recession looms and Americans lose their jobs, their healthcare, their homes, it is time for *real* change in our economic priorities. Obama almost certainly cannot deliver real change—particularly if he challenges the centrist Clinton from the right. I hope I am wrong. Obama is an inspirational orator and an intelligent, likable man. But I make my decisions based on his public record.
Donna Palermino

Kennebunkport, Me.
With a record 2.2 million foreclosures in 2007 and a staggering 5 million estimated for 2008, a serious social and economic crisis threatens millions of Americans. As a candidate for the US Senate (www.DobsonforSenate.com), I have been calling for a five-year nationwide freeze on all foreclosures (homes, farms, factories, hospitals, utilities and infrastructure) since last October. The interests of greedy Wall Street speculators have been put above those of families who face losing their homes. Sadly, Senator Obama does not confront the crisis.
Laurie Dobson

Stormy Weather

Chicago
As someone who scripted a few pages of Pekar and Buhle's *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History*, I found it interesting that Maurice Isserman ["Weather Reports," Feb. 11] tossed SDS, PLP and the Weatherman faction into the category of Protestant militants: they "mistook revolution...for a moral choice." Yes indeed, we wanted to turn the moral world upside down, to decriminalize sexuality and criminalize war. We weren't simply hoping to change the personnel of the state but to create a new moral world. In the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr., Dave Dellinger, Barbara Deming and Herbert Marcuse, revolution is a moral choice or it is nothing. Our vision was one of a world without war, a world of equality. Our faults were many, but our one virtue may have been our "moral choice," the choice to stand up against war.
Penelope Rosemont
Foundation for a Democratic Society

Buffalo, N.Y.
Maurice Isserman aptly but dismissively situates John Brown and the 1960s revolutionary New Left together in the American tradition of radical individualism. What is missing from Isserman's lifeless analysis is an appreciation of the extent to which these individualistic yet concerted skirmishes galvanized others' perceptions, changing the course of events. Just as the courage of John Brown and his company terrified slaveholders and inspired more mild-mannered abolitionists, so Bernardine Dohrn, Eric Mann and the Weathermen and their heirs caused Nixon and Kissinger, fearing chaos, to limit their criminal enterprise while moving many of us, a little less reckless, toward a greater commitment to stop the genocide in Vietnam.
William W. Berry

Savannah
Maurice Isserman has hit the nail on the head with his comparison of some in the New Left to Protestant individualist moralists. I was part of an obscure (and definitely not "sexy") part of SDS (Steve Max, Doug Ireland) that regarded much of this foofaraw as narcissistic posturing. Isserman's notion is more correct and more to the point. There is such a disconnect between the early SDS and its later iterations that it is unfair to speak of it as one organization. We wimpy pacifists of the Port Huron generation had little in common with the window-smashing, bomb-making folks who came later. But we were not nearly as photogenic.
Jim Williams

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 30)

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Wiretapped Out

As the presidential primaries hurtle toward some sort of clarity, on one critical issue the air in Washington grows murkier: warrantless wiretaps. For months George W. Bush has sought to make permanent his constitutionally toxic Protect America Act (PAA), passed as a temporary measure last August, giving the executive branch unprecedented electronic surveillance powers that bypassed the well-established Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act courts. The Administration also wanted to insulate telecommunications companies from lawsuits for past illegal cooperation with wiretapping security agencies.

EDITORIAL

It is a measure of shifting political sands that Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Democrats found the gumption to take a stand against the President and halt the PAA, letting it expire, at least for now, as Congress headed for recess. Telecommunications company immunity in particular roused strong opposition among Democrats. Pelosi had offered the White House a short extension of the PAA during which to negotiate the issue, but the President, as usual, refused to compromise.

The House's confrontation with the President is especially notable because the Senate had already folded its cards. Nearly half of Senate Democrats took the cautious road of voting in favor of the wiretapping law, joining Republicans to pass the bill, complete with telecommunications company immunity, despite months of courageous pleas and parliamentary maneuvering led by Chris Dodd of Connecticut. (Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, it should be noted, missed the warrantless wiretap vote. Both said they would have voted against the bill, and Obama had opposed telecommunications company immunity on an earlier procedural vote. Senator John McCain, on the other hand, robustly supported the PAA, calling it "an absolute necessity to protect this nation.")

The House's refusal to cave in to Bush creates a rare moment to reconsider some of the most ill-conceived, unconstitutional and unnecessary laws brought up for a vote since the September 11 attacks. Until now, modifications to the PAA proposed in the House and the Senate have been modest and limited. Both versions would allow the government to conduct wholesale surveillance inside the country unrelated to terrorism—an electronic dragnet, rather than individually targeted taps. Neither would provide adequate safeguards for information collected about American citizens.

The Congressional debate over electronic surveillance gained even greater urgency on February 19, when the Supreme Court declined to hear the American Civil Liberties Union's lawsuit challenging warrantless wiretapping. Some members of Congress may have hoped that the Court would take the heat off with a definitive ruling one way or another—but for now, at least, the ball is in Congress's court.

If we've learned anything about President Bush, it is that his appetite for extralegal power is insatiable, and his willingness to abuse the judicial system is boundless. On page 4, Ross Tuttle exposes the Administration's manipulation of the Guantánamo capital trials in an attempt to ensure that there will be no acquittals. Any concession from Congress or the courts—whether on Guantánamo, the Patriot Act or surveillance—will lead to new abuses.

For now the Protect America Act is off the books. Emboldened by their confrontation with the White House, Pelosi and House Democrats can and should go further, calling a permanent halt to one more Bush end-run around the Constitution.

Page 22: Mahdi Army militiamen celebrate.

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RADIO NATION

Laura Flanders & Slavenka Drakulic on Kosovo

AROUND THE NATION

Post your event on our calendar

NATION POLL

How will the Democrats deal with Florida and Michigan?

Rigged Trials at Gitmo

Secret evidence. Denial of habeas corpus. Evidence obtained by waterboarding. Indefinite detention. The litany of complaints about the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay is long, disturbing and by now familiar. Nonetheless, a new wave of shock and criticism greeted the Pentagon's announcement on February 11 that it was charging six Guantánamo detainees, including alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, with war crimes—and seeking the death penalty for all of them.

COMMENT

Now, as the murky, quasi-legal staging of the Bush Administration's military commissions unfolds, a key official has told *The Nation* that the trials have been rigged from the start. According to Col. Morris Davis, former chief prosecutor for Guantánamo's military commissions, the process has been manipulated by Administration appointees to foreclose the possibility of acquittal.

Colonel Davis's criticism of the commissions has been escalating since he resigned in October, telling the *Washington Post* that he had been pressured by politically appointed senior Defense officials to pursue cases deemed "sexy" and of "high interest" (such as the 9/11 cases now being pursued) in the run-up to the 2008 elections. Davis, once a staunch defender of the commissions process, elaborated on his reasons in a December 10, 2007, *Los Angeles Times* op-ed. "I concluded that full, fair and open trials were not possible under the current system," he wrote. "I felt that the system had become deeply politicized and that I could no longer do my job effectively."

Then, in an interview with *The Nation* in February after the six Guantánamo detainees were charged, Davis offered the most damning evidence of the military commissions' bias—a revelation that speaks to fundamental flaws in the Bush Administration's conduct of statecraft: its contempt for the rule of law and its pursuit of political objectives above all else.

When asked if he thought the men at Guantánamo could receive a fair trial, Davis provided the following account of an August 2005 meeting he had with Pentagon general counsel William Haynes—the man who now oversees the tribunal process for the Defense Department.

"[Haynes] said these trials will be the Nuremberg of our time," recalled Davis, referring to the Nazi tribunals in 1945, considered the model of procedural rights in the prosecution of war crimes. In response, Davis said he noted that at Nuremberg there had been some acquittals, which had lent great credibility to the proceedings.

"I said to him that if we come up short and there are some acquittals in our cases, it will at least validate the process," Davis continued. "At which point, [Haynes's] eyes got wide and he said, 'Wait a minute, we can't have acquittals. If we've been holding these guys for so long, how can we explain letting them get off? We can't have acquittals. We've got to have convictions.'"

Davis submitted his resignation on October 4, 2007, just hours after he was informed that Haynes had been put above

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him in the commissions' chain of command. "Everyone has opinions," Davis says. "But when he was put above me, his opinions became orders."

Reached for comment, Defense Department spokeswoman Cynthia Smith said, "The Department of Defense disputes the assertions made by Colonel Davis in this statement regarding acquittals."

"The fact that [Haynes] said there can be no acquittals will stain the entire [tribunal] process," says Scott Horton, who teaches law at Columbia University Law School and has written extensively about Haynes's conflicts with the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) corps, the judicial arm of the armed forces, which is charged with implementing the military commissions. According to Horton, Haynes tried to cut the JAG corps out of internal debates over the detention and prosecution of detainees, knowing it was critical of the Administration's views. In private memos and in public Senate testimony, high-ranking officers of the corps have repeatedly expressed concerns about the Administration's justification of "extreme interrogation techniques."

"The JAG corps consists of a group of rigorous professionals, but Haynes never trusted them to do their job," says Horton. "His clashes have always had the same subtext—they want to be independent; he wants them to do political dirty work."

Haynes, a political appointee and chief legal adviser to Defense secretaries Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates, was nominated in 2006 by the Bush Administration for a lifetime seat as a judge in the Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. But his nomination never got out of committee, primarily because of the opposition of Republican Senator (and former military lawyer) Lindsey Graham and other members alarmed over Haynes's role in writing, or supervising the writing of, Pentagon memos advocating the use of harsh interrogation techniques the Geneva Conventions classify as torture.

Currently, in his capacity as Pentagon general counsel, Haynes oversees both the prosecution and the defense for the Guantánamo commissions.

"You would think a person in that position wouldn't be favoring one side," says Colonel Davis.

Told of Davis's story about Haynes, Clive Stafford Smith, a defense attorney who has represented more than seventy Guantánamo clients, said, "Hearing it makes me think I'm back in Mississippi representing a black man in front of an all-white jury."

He adds, "It confirms what people close to the system have always said," noting that when three prosecutors—Maj. Robert Preston, Capt. John Carr and Capt. Carrie Wolf—requested to be transferred out of the Office of Military Commissions in 2004, they said they'd been told the process was rigged. In an e-mail to his supervisors, Preston had said that there was thin evidence against the accused. "But they were told by the chief prosecutor at the time that they didn't need evidence to get convictions," says Stafford Smith.

At the time, the military wrote it off as "miscommunication" and "personality conflicts." And then there were changes in personnel. "They told us that the system had been cleaned up…but I guess the more things change, the more they stay the same," says Stafford Smith.

Noted.

POLKED! In 2007 *Nation* contributors **Joshua Kors** and **Jeremy Scahill** exposed different facets of the corrupt and tragic US occupation of Iraq. February 19 Kors and Scahill were honored for their work with **George Polk Awards**—one of America's most prestigious journalism prizes. Kors was awarded the magazine prize for uncovering a stunning pattern of benefit denials by the Department of Veteran Affairs (see "Thanks for Nothing" and "Specialist Town Takes His Case to Washington"). Cataloging scores of incidents where the VA had refused care to soldiers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, Kors's reporting led to Congressional hearings, an amendment to the Defense Authorization Act and back benefits for many of the affected veterans.

Scahill was awarded the book prize for *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, published by **Nation Books**. Scahill's investigation of Blackwater's role in Iraq appeared more than two years ago in our pages in a series of muckraking articles—culminating in his April cover story, "Bush's Shadow Army."

PROGRESSIVES FOR… Barack Obama narrowly leads **Hillary Clinton** in endorsements from members of the **Congressional Progressive Caucus**. Obama has twenty-seven endorsements compared to Clinton's twenty-five; nineteen are still uncommitted. Obama backers include CPC co-chair **Barbara Lee**; House Judiciary Committee chair **John Conyers**; **Keith Ellison**, the first Muslim elected to Congress; and **George Miller**, Nancy Pelosi's confidant. Clinton boosters include CPC co-chair **Lynn Woolsey**; Out of Iraq Caucus chair **Maxine Waters**; and **Tammy Baldwin** and **Barney Frank**, the only openly gay members of Congress. Prominent undecideds include **Bernie Sanders**, **Dennis Kucinich** and **Henry Waxman**.

TEARS FOR TIERS: After posting nearly $40 billion in losses last year, **General Motors** has offered its remaining 74,000 hourly employees a fat new buyout package in another effort to drive down labor costs. They will be replaced by entry-level workers earning almost $50 less an hour after benefits. For the **UAW**, it's surely a bitter pill to swallow. Since signing a disappointing contract last fall, the union has watched its biggest concession—a deep pay cut for all new hires—become industry standard. Having pushed the union to accept a two-tiered labor market, GM is now hard at work wiping out the top tier altogether. The *New York Times* hailed the move as a sign of a "turnaround" in the domestic auto industry. But it's also a sign of the steady erosion of well-paid union jobs that were once the economic lifeblood of the industrial heartland. Similar buyout plans are on the table at **Ford** and **Chrysler**.

MAX FRASER

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The terrible truth is that even if acquittals were possible, the government has declared that it can continue to detain anyone deemed an "enemy combatant" for the duration of hostilities—no matter the outcome of a trial. Most of the 275 men held at Guantánamo are classified as "enemy combatants," and the hostilities in the "war on terror" could be never-ending.

Says ACLU staff attorney Ben Wizner, "The trial doesn't make a difference. They can hold you there forever until they decide to let you out." The one person to be released from Guantánamo through the judicial process, Australian David Hicks, pleaded guilty. As Wizner wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* in April 2007, "In an ordinary justice system, the accused must be acquitted to be released. In Guantánamo, the accused must plead guilty to be released."

Still, the trials serve a purpose for the government by providing the semblance of a legitimate judicial process. According to defense attorneys involved—and many of the former prosecutors, like Davis—the process is political, not legal.

"If someone was acquitted, then it would suggest we did the wrong thing in the first place. That can't happen," says Horton sardonically. "When the government decides to clear someone, it calls the person 'no longer an enemy combatant' instead of just saying they made a mistake."

He adds, "For people like Haynes, justice is meant to serve the party."

ROSS TUTTLE

Ross Tuttle is a documentary filmmaker and freelance journalist based in Los Angeles. Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

On One of the Sabbath-Gasbag Discussions, Robert Novak Says That Mike Huckabee May Have Remained in The Race to Bolster His Lecture Fee

So, possibly, is Huckabee
Just burnishing his lecture fee?
The speeches he once gave for free
On Jesus in Gethsemane
And why a human couldn't be
Descended from a chimpanzee
Can cost a bundle now that he
Spends so much time on NBC.
Another thought occurs to me:
Is that why Novak's on TV?

Bhutto's Tangled Legacy

Lahore

As a referendum on President Pervez Musharraf's eight years in power, Pakistan's national and provincial elections were damning. His ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML) was routed, especially in the majority Punjab Province. And the coalition of religious parties he cobbled together to face down national and secular parties in the restive North West Frontier Province (NWFP) was itself voted down after five years of "Islamic" government. The civilian cloth Musharraf and Washington had used to cover the nakedness of his military rule was blown away on February 18, like dead leaves in a gale.

COMMENT

Many saw the vote as a posthumous revenge for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, since her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won a plurality of seats in the new assemblies. But the reading is glib. True, the rural poor in her native Sindh Province swept the PPP to shore on a tide of anger at her murder in December. The PPP also picked up seats in the NWFP and Baluchistan Province, raised by the same swell. Yet the tide ebbed in the political heartlands, the cities of Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The PPP did not win Pakistan's urban capitals. Why?

Aitzaz Ahsan is a lawyer and a prominent PPP leader. Last year he led a successful mass movement of lawyers against Musharraf's botched dismissal of Pakistan's chief justice, Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry. Ahsan believes the election results are a vindication of that campaign—and a lesson for his party. "After Benazir's death we assumed the people, like us, would be driven by emotion," he said. "But the elections showed people did not vote out of sympathy. They voted on the issues."

The issues party in these elections was not the PPP. It was the Muslim League of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (PML-N). In an impressive campaign Sharif etched two demands on the popular psyche: first, there could be no democracy under a military dictatorship. Second, there could be no recognition of Musharraf's presidency unless Chaudhry and the other judges purged in last year's emergency rule were reinstated.

It was a call that resounded with lawyers, journalists, students and civil society activists in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad—precisely those cities and middle-class constituencies galvanized by the campaign for the chief justice's restoration. The PML-N made them its core supporters. The PPP's core supporters, by contrast, were the rural poor and feudal lords of the provinces. For them the only issue was patronage and honoring Bhutto's memory. They had almost nothing to say about where the PPP stood on Musharraf, military rule and the judiciary. "Yes," concedes Ahsan, "Sharif stole the march on us."

It could hardly have been otherwise. Bhutto returned to Pakistan last fall as part of a US-mediated trade with Musharraf. Very simply, in return for amnesty on corruption charges acquired during her time in office in the 1990s, she agreed to shore up another five-year Musharraf presidency. She pointedly told her cadres to tail, not lead, the mass campaign against his rule.

Urban PPP leaders like Ahsan welcomed Bhutto's return, but they were dismayed by the terms. They believed the deal undermined the best chance in years to restore constitutional govern-

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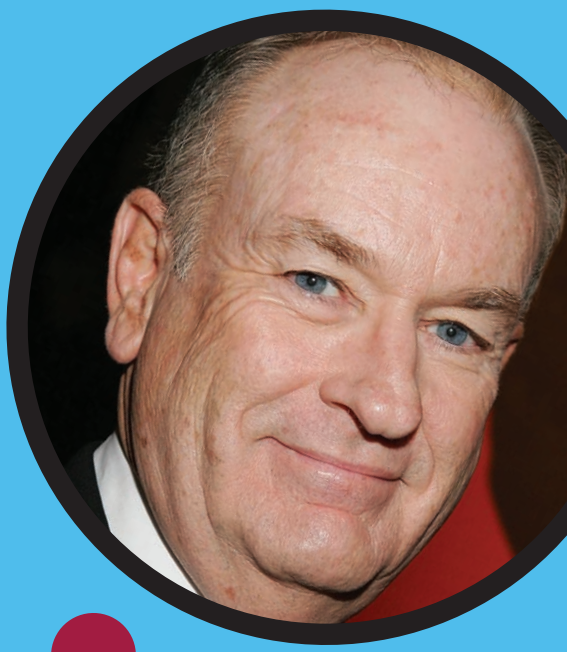

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ment. They also knew that truck with the dictator would alienate the young, educated, urban middle class, the very constituency it would need if it was ever to be a force again in the main cities. Bhutto was unapologetic. She said the dynamic would wheel in the PPP's favor once she returned to the country and began campaigning. She also argued that there could be no transition to democracy without the support of Washington and the army. The only other road was violence and/or martial law. The debate smoldered on until her assassination. The election confirmed protagonists on both sides: the PPP could arouse the poor only because of her return and terrible death. But it lost the cities, and the urban middle class, because of the deal.

The debate will now be rekindled. On February 19 the PPP central executive, headed by Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, accepted the election results and began the arduous task of forming a government. Two roads lie before it, both legacies of Zardari's late wife. But only one goes anywhere. Washington and Musharraf are counseling the road just taken: Zardari should revive the deal sealed by Benazir. In return for an "alliance of moderate forces in Pakistan"—and the premiership—the PPP should refrain from taking constitutional action against Musharraf. To hammer the point home, the State Department has said the Administration will continue to work with the Pakistani president "and whatever the new government may be," as though the election results were simply a passing breeze.

It's a nonstarter, says Ahsan. "If Mr. Zardari makes that commitment, Nawaz Sharif will leave the coalition. The PPP would then have to form a government with the pro-Musharraf Muslim League. We'll be endorsing a leader and leadership the electorate has just rejected." The PPP would also be headed for a collision with large sections of its own party as well as the lawyers, who plan to relaunch mass protests for Chaudhry's and the other judges' reinstatement.

A better road would be for the PPP to form a government with Nawaz Sharif and complete the fight the lawyers began: establishing a civilian government based on parliamentary democracy and constitutional rule. It would clearly mean the ousting of Musharraf, since none of those ideas are compatible with the authoritarian presidential system he has minted.

That route may anger the Bush Administration, but the real imponderable is the response of what is always the gravest threat to democracy here: Pakistan's army. Its new chief, Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, says he wants the army out of politics. He has taken a few cosmetic measures to remove officers from civilian jobs, and the army did permit elections free enough for the opposition to win. But there are historical precedents for this, says military analyst Ayesha Siddiqa. "The military tends to allow free and fair elections whenever it has a crisis of legitimacy with the public. It momentarily releases control to keep its power intact."

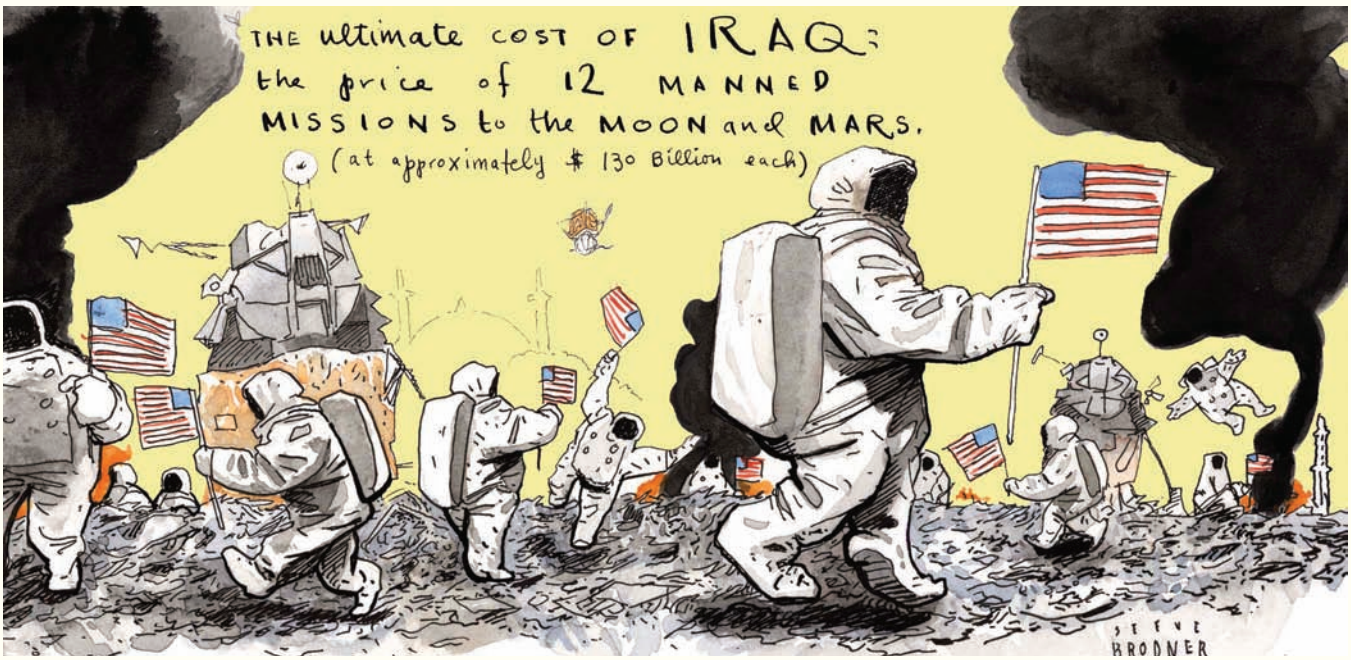
That power is immense. On Musharraf's watch the army became a leviathan: it's worth $20 billion in assets and controls a third of all manufacturing. Aside from the handful Kayani demobilized, there remain hundreds of retired officers in civilian posts in ministries and state corporations. Until recently Kayani was head of the army's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, one of the most politicized intelligence forces on earth. It was he—not the elected prime minister—who negotiated Musharraf's deal with Bhutto. The idea that such an institution would voluntarily give up these interests is imaginary, especially when its hegemony is underwritten by billions in US aid. If the army has allowed more democratic space with these elections, it is because of the lawyers' protests. Further retreats will require further protest—mass, nonviolent and constitutional. Despite her enormous courage, Benazir Bhutto always balked at that fight, usually under coaching from America. It's important her party doesn't make the same mistake.

GRAHAM USHER

Graham Usher is a journalist based in Islamabad.

Comix Nation

by STEVE BRODNER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the price of 12 MANNED
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(at approximately $ 130 Billion each)
STEVE BRODNER

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If you're like me, you'd love to get Mom into the electronic family loop. My mom doesn't want to use a computer, so until now I haven't been able to send her email. Recently, a friend told me about a great solution she found. It's called the HP Printing Mailbox with Presto Service, and it lets her send email, photos, and PDF documents to her parents even though they don't have a computer.

Stay Connected to Family

My grown kids and I rely on email to stay in touch. Keeping in touch with my Mom is different. She doesn't have or want a computer, and while I always had good intentions of printing photos and sending

letters, I just didn't have the time. Sure, I call a lot, but she was missing out on all of the great family emails and photos that I get from my kids.

Simple Technology Makes Staying in Touch Easy

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Eric Alterman

Conservative Cannibalism

"Where are the Friedmans now? Where are the Buckleys?" asks David Frum in *Comeback*, his new analysis of what's gone wrong with conservatism. It's not a bad question. Milton Friedman changed the world with his ideas. William F. Buckley Jr. did so with his talents for movement building and magazine sustenance and his personal ambition. And as good conservatives, they were following in an honorable tradition. If you look at the great thinkers of the conservative movement, they wrote books. Not only Friedman and Buckley but also Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, Whittaker Chambers, even Allan Bloom. But after eight catastrophic years in power, conservatives are out of ideas. Those who write books today do so largely as personal marketing strategies. (Neither Karl Rove nor William Kristol, arguably the right's two most influential thinkers, has ever seen fit to sustain a book-length argument about anything at all, much less political philosophy.)

A former Bush apparatchik turned hagiographer who was briefly famous after his wife sent out a mass e-mail claiming he deserved credit for the phrase "axis of evil," Frum is clearly having second thoughts. For instance, he is willing to admit that the Bush Administration has been a near-complete disaster. Still, he peppers his analysis with enough bizarre assertions to lead a reader to wonder just how rational he believes his audience to be. Can a sane person really call George W. Bush a "middle of the road" President in domestic policy? Does Frum really believe it's impossible to support both organized labor and the genuinely poor? (Which side would he have put Cesar Chavez on, for instance?) And if "no Republican politician would ever advocate a value-added tax," just who the heck is this Huckabee fellow? Frum's policy proposals, while not always outlandish, occasionally strain credulity. For instance, he advocates using government funds to establish an Office of Marriage and Children. If this is the stuff of a conservative "comeback," then liberals can rest easy.

Frum's book ain't much, but compared with Jonah Goldberg's, it's another *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. As you may recall, Goldberg's primary claim to public attention derived from exploiting the disreputable part his mother, Lucianne Goldberg, played in Linda Tripp's betrayal of Monica Lewinsky. Then employed as the vice president of Mom's right-wing literary agency, Goldberg told reporters he planned to pen a "*Bonfire of the Vanities*–type thing about stories peripheral to the scandal," with imagined movie deals to follow. Well, the only person who might imagine making a movie of the book Goldberg finally did write a decade later would be Mel Brooks. *Liberal Fascism* is the "Springtime for Hitler" of intellectual history. The book reads like a Google search gone gaga. Some Fascists were vegetarians; some liberals are vegetarians; ergo… Some Fascists were gay; some liberals are gay… Fascists cared about educating children; Hillary Clinton cares about educating children. Aha! (I see from my own ten seconds of Googling that cult leader Lyndon LaRouche beat Goldberg to this argument by five years with an essay titled "How Liberalism Created Fascism," published by his presidential committee. Hmmm.) People, this is a book that argues that Woodrow Wilson "was the twentieth century's first fascist dictator" and that it is "impossible to deny that the New Deal was objectively fascistic." It's a rare book, indeed, that can be fairly judged by its cover, but I really do think that a smiley face with a Hitler mustache tells you all you will ever need to know about *Liberal Fascism*.

As dumb as *Liberal Fascism* may be, Goldberg has managed to sound even dumber when discussing it. He has modestly described his book as "a very serious, thoughtful argument that has never been made in such detail or with such care." And in an interview published in *Salon*, he actually makes the statement, "The only reason [Mussolini] got dubbed a Fascist and therefore a right-winger is because he supported World War I." Of course, out here in the real world, we think of Mussolini as the fellow who founded what would become Italy's National Fascist Party and became a proud dictator in its name, which would strike most people as a better reason to dub him a Fascist. Now, anyone can misspeak, but, dude, that's the topic of your book. (Unfortunately this magic moment, appearing as it did in *Salon*, cannot be made into a YouTube video so it could take its rightful place alongside Miss South Carolina and the most recent classic, *American Idol*'s Kellie Pickler. Ms. Pickler, when asked in which European country could be found the city of Budapest, explained, "I thought Europe *was* a country," adding upon being given the correct answer by a fifth grader, "Hungry? That's a country? I've heard of Turkey. But Hungry?")

I'm tempted to call the publication of *Liberal Fascism* an intellectual scandal, but I remember that I live in a country where White House press secretary Dana Perino can admit to having no idea what the Cuban missile crisis was. ("Wasn't that like the Bay of Pigs thing?") And it thrives in a culture where Ann Coulter not only rules bestseller lists but has found herself, according to the nonprofit Media Matters, interviewed nearly 200 times on at least thirteen programs on MSNBC, CNBC and NBC, not including the period she worked there. True, Goldberg does not call people "faggots" in public or speculate merrily on the joys of mass murder, but his scholarly method is most definitely Coulterian. Like Coulter, he's got a bunch of footnotes. And for all I know, they check out. But they are put in the service of an argument that no one with any knowledge of the topic would take seriously. "The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself," Ralph Waldo Emerson once observed, I learn from Susan Jacoby's excellent book *The Age of American Unreason*. (I wonder if Emerson was tempted to call his work *Conservative Cannibalism*.) Where, oh where, are the Friedmans of yesteryear? ■

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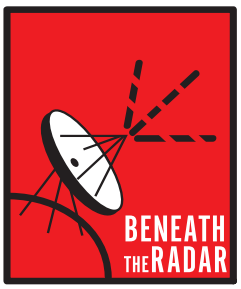
Gary Younge

Feudal Democracy

"The surface of American society is covered with a layer of democratic paint," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville in his classic nineteenth-century treatise *Democracy in America*. "But from time to time one can see the old aristocratic colors breaking through." In a nation where 5 percent of senators are doing the jobs their fathers did, and 40 percent of the people have lived with only one or two families—Bush and Clinton—in the White House, it's time for an extreme makeover.

True, over the past couple of months people have had the chance to vote and, among Democrats, have been doing so in record numbers. In South Carolina, Barack Obama received more votes than the entire Democratic field in 2004. But while Democrats have become energized by the elections, the party leaders have become enervated with democracy.



The notion that this race might be settled democratically increasingly appears more a question of pragmatism than a point of principle. If the primaries are not sufficiently decisive, it seems that the nomination will be brokered by the "elders." Superdelegates are slowly ceding their authority to a handful of superduperdelegates. Al Gore and former Senate majority leader George Mitchell are the two "elder statesmen" most often touted with sufficient standing to fix whatever democracy might happen to break.

So after all the brouhaha about this being a historic election that has drawn the young and disaffected into the process and broken the mold in terms of race and gender, the outcome may now be determined in a more feudal manner. Old white guys ruling on what's best for the family.

The trouble with this Democratic aristocracy, like all aristocracies, is that it is woefully out of touch with the demands of those for whom it purports to speak. Put more simply, nobody really seems to take much notice of them.

In this election cycle endorsements do not seem to have made the slightest difference. Obama bagged support from Massachusetts Senators Ted Kennedy and John Kerry and Governor Deval Patrick, only to lose the state by 15 percent. No number of Kennedy heirs could make a difference in California or New York. Linda Sánchez, the Congresswoman from California's 39th District, endorsed Obama, but only 29 percent of her constituents backed him. Conversely, Maxine Waters, from California's 35th District, supported Hillary Clinton, but 59 percent of her constituents went for Obama.

This doesn't mean that these people are entirely without influence or power; simply that when it comes to taking advice about how to vote, most voters don't turn to the Democratic Party elite. The Tammany Hall days when party chieftains wielded machines that could distribute votes at will and whim are long gone. America's political class has neither the credibility nor the clout to pull it off. Indeed, if anything, the pull is going in the other direction. Several black Congressmen who have already endorsed Hillary are feeling the heat back home and from colleagues. Now that Obama's candidacy is clearly viable, they fear going down in history as having blocked a black President and are openly discussing shifting their superdelegate vote. Now *that's* principled leadership!

This doesn't mean there aren't problems with the rules. Take Texas. It takes thirty-seven pages to explain its selection process, and it still doesn't make sense. Two-thirds of the 228 delegates are chosen according to the vote in thirty-one districts. The rest are drawn from caucuses held on the same night. The number of delegates assigned to each district is determined by how many voters in that district voted Democratic in the last presidential and gubernatorial elections. The number varies from two to eight and heavily favors African-American districts over Latino ones—as if we didn't have enough to deal with.

Any electoral process in the Western world where you still don't know who's won two weeks after the polls are closed clearly does not work. At the time of this writing, according to CNN, 6 percent of California's pledged delegates had still not been allocated. So long as these are the rules, of course, everyone just has to deal with them as best they can. But the longer this race goes on, the more it seems as though the real function of the primaries is for the candidates to present themselves and win by acclaim. The actual elections appear to have been devised as an afterthought.

But in a race where the delegate count actually matters—which hasn't been the case for some time—the only way to resolve it is a *Sopranos*-style sit-down, where the heavies divvy up the spoils. If it comes to this, the Democrats could find themselves snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

"In the endgame," said one of the world's best-ever chess players, José Raúl Capablanca, "don't think in terms of moves but in terms of plans." As we approach this endgame, each side is trying any number of moves, from reviving Michigan and Florida to flipping superdelegates and pledged delegates. But ultimately the plan is to beat the Republicans in November. Democrats simply cannot do that with a candidate who has no democratic legitimacy. The only way you get that is by giving the nomination to the candidate who wins the most delegates.

This should not be difficult. Polls consistently show that most Democrats are divided evenly but not bitterly. They would be happy with either candidate as their nominee. That will no longer be the case if the victor emerges from Denver in August with the same level of credibility as George W. Bush did from Florida in 2000.

A debacle of that magnitude would gift-wrap the presidency for the Republicans. After all, if Democratic voters didn't choose their candidate, why should the country at large? This is not an argument for a candidate but for a principle. Moreover, it is one of those rare moments when the progressive principle makes electoral sense. If democracy does not prevail in August, then the Democrats will not prevail in November. ■

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THE OLD REVOLUTIONARIES OF VIETNAM

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM HAYDEN

Thirty-two years after his last visit, the author returns to Vietnam and finds a bustling market economy awash in foreign capital and consumer goods.

by TOM HAYDEN

During Christmas 2007 I traveled back in time with my family, to Vietnam, for the first time in thirty-two years. I was feeling a deep need to see the place once more, a regret at having withdrawn from a country I had visited four times during the war. I wanted to understand the long-term lessons and, on a personal basis, track down the Vietnamese guides and translators, men and women, who assumed an ideological faith in the American "people" they escorted through ruins inflicted by the American "enemy." They would become important diplomatic bridges between our two countries in the postwar period. Most were survivors of the French and American wars and would be in their 80s by now. Were they still alive? How had they suffered? After the exuberance at their victory and reunification after 1975, how had they adjusted to a Vietnam without war? Vietnam's consul in San Francisco, Chau Do, said many of these old revolutionaries were alive, excited by my return and inquiring whom I wanted to see. I told him that my closest Vietnamese friend was a poet, musician and translator, Do Xuan Oanh, who was perhaps 40 in those days. "I can help you find him," Chau replied with a smile. "He's my dad." My eyes filled with tears. It would be quite a trip.

Before I would reunite with these old friends and contacts, however, I plunged into the shocking contrasts between past and present in Hanoi. Between Christmas 1965 and November 1972, when I made four unauthorized visits to Hanoi, the wartime city was unlit and ghostly. Most people had been evacuated to the countryside. Air-raid sirens and public-safety broadcasts were the only urban sounds. There was no economic development beyond the construction of pontoon bridges to replace bridges bombed by the Americans. The only motorized vehicles were military ones. Most residents rode bicycles or carried their meager wares on bamboo poles across their shoulders. Water buffalo pulled the heavier loads. To outward appearances, Gen. Curtis LeMay's plan to bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age was on track.

Finally came the Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong by 200 B-52s, from December 18 to December 28, 1972. The United States says that fifteen of the giant Stratofortresses were shot down and ninety-three American airmen went missing before the bombing ended (Hanoi says thirty-four B-52s and eighty-one fighter planes were put out of action). Estimates of civilian deaths range from 1,600 to 2,368 in those eleven days, and Hanoi listed 5,480 buildings destroyed. In the American narrative, the Christmas bombing forced Hanoi to sign the Paris peace agreement one month later. But under terms agreed to by the Nixon Administration, North Vietnamese units remained positioned in the south, and in 1975 they stormed Saigon. What is beyond dispute is that crowded Hanoi neighborhoods and the Bach Mai hospital were reduced to rubble during the Christmas B-52 raids. The last time I had seen Hanoi was in 1974, when Jane Fonda and I walked through the hospital debris and interviewed still-furious victims of the Christmas 1972 bombs.

Now, suddenly for me, it was Christmas 2007 and Vietnam was ablaze with festive holiday lights, from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. Though billboards of Ho Chi Minh were pervasive, the most ubiquitous bearded one this Christmas season was

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Santa Claus, beckoning shoppers from department store doorways, seen incongruously riding motorbikes, waving to little children. Spectacular strings of red and green lights were draped over the streets and stores, blinking at thousands of Vietnamese rolling along on bicycles and motorbikes, parting smoothly like schools of fish around pedestrians crossing the street. Restaurant-goers applauded Christmas carols sung by young Vietnamese women strapped in Heineken Girls sashes. None of this was about Jesus—Christmas is not a tradition in this Buddhist and secular-Marxist country—but all about corporate branding. The fancy Diamond department store next to Independence Palace was filled with shoppers, gawkers and Santas wandering the aisles of Lego, Calvin Klein, Victoria's Secret, Nike, Converse, Estée Lauder, Ferragamo and Bally. The nearby Saigon Centre bore a billboard proclaiming, More Shops, More Life.

Far be it from me to question the desire of Vietnamese to share our globalized consumer culture like everyone else, or to reject their aspiration to be the next Asian Tiger, or freeze them in memory as icons of selfless revolutionaries. Gentrification and consumerism, after all, have destroyed the character of my favorite American haunts, like North Beach, Berkeley, Venice and Aspen. It seems the way of the world. As I walked through the busy Christmas streets, however, I was gripped by the question of why the Vietnam War was necessary in the first place. Why kill, maim and uproot millions of Vietnamese if the outcome was a consumer wonderland approved by the country's still-undefeated Communist Party? The whole wretched American rationale for the war, that Vietnam was a dangerous domino, a pawn in the cold war, seemed so painfully wrong. Was there any connection between destroying so much life and causing the Vietnamese to go Christmas shopping? Would the same outcome—a one-party socialist government leading a market economy—have occurred in any event, without the destruction? Now that US naval ships were paying peaceful visits to Da Nang, this question nagged at me: is it possible that Marxism and nationalism won the war but capitalism and nationalism have won the peace?

Vietnam is a consumer wonderland approved by the still-undefeated Communist Party, so why was the war necessary in the first place?

Those who still believe Vietnam was a "necessary" war must take pleasure at seeing that country in the camp of corporate neoliberalism. A proud new member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Vietnam is welcoming a $1 billion Intel project to Ho Chi Minh City this year, and has accepted the wholesale privatization of telecommunications and other industries.

Some in Hanoi are dismayed by all this. An American expatriate, Gerry Herman, a former antiwar activist turned businessman and film distributor who has lived in Vietnam for fifteen years, told me the Vietnamese were so desperately eager to normalize relations with the United States that they accepted the most liberal market reforms of any developing country. Having some internal knowledge of the trade negotiations, he says bitterly that Vietnam was blackmailed by the US negotiators. To gain export markets for their textiles, shoes and seafood, they slashed subsidies and opened markets in banking, insurance, services and advertising to private corporations. For Herman, the distressing prospect is that Vietnam will follow the failed model of the Philippines, not the more successful Asian Tigers whose development benefited from government subsidies.

China, Herman says, got a better deal than Vietnam, winning twenty years of protection for its telecommunications industry. "The American negotiators said to Vietnam that they were beaten by the Chinese on certain issues and would never do it again, and Vietnam could take the deal or leave it." The Americans, in deference to domestic political pressure, even demanded market access for Harley-Davidson, against the Vietnamese complaint that the larger, faster Harleys would worsen the high accident rates on their narrow, congested roads. "The Vietnamese negotiator broke down in tears," Herman said, over the Harley concession. I suddenly remembered the cynical 1960s strategy of Harvard's Samuel Huntington, that forced urbanization would transform the Vietnamese into a "Honda culture." It was coming true before my eyes, with the Honda Dream motorcycle and, sooner or later, the Harley. As a Vietnamese named Pham Thong Long blogged last July, "I have only one dream is buy one of brand new Harley-Davidson, now I waiting for Harley-Davidson deal to open in Saigon. I need a Fatboy."

It is difficult to discern the truth across these cultural divides. Scholars like Gabriel Kolko have predicted the disintegration of the Vietnamese Communist Party for decades, but the political situation by most accounts is stable, even improved. Thao Griffiths, a 30-year-old who directs the Hanoi office of Vietnam Veterans of America, reminded me of certain fundamentals on my first day adjusting to the new Hanoi. "Since thirty years ago when you were first here, we have motorbikes in addition to bicycles, cellphones more than land lines, an Internet, and most of our population like myself was born after the wars. It has been a time to catch up in peace." As for Hanoi's accepting the WTO, Thao said, "We knew the mechanism was not fair, but the strategic reason is that we had to get inside. We didn't really have 'normal' economic relations with the US until 2006, for four decades. Even last year, Bush was saying America should have stayed the course in Vietnam." Thao herself reflected postwar Vietnam: fluent in English and a former Fulbright scholar, she spent two years at the Vietnam veterans' office in Washington, DC, deeply involved in the normalization process. She has two children with her Australian husband, Patrick, a researcher for the United Nations. Her little boy, Liem, immediately befriended our 7-year-old Liam on sleepovers and trips to fabled Ha Long Bay.

Tom Hayden is the author of The Other Side *(1966, with Staughton Lynd),* The Love of Possession Is a Disease With Them *(1972) and* Ending the War in Iraq *(2007). He was cleared of conspiracy charges after leading anti–Vietnam War protests at the 1968 Democratic convention, and he directed the Indochina Peace Campaign from 1972 to '75. He taught classes on Indochina in 1971 and on the Iraq War in 2007, both at Pitzer College.*

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Preserve your entire music collection with this CD Recorder.

This high fidelity system plays your favorite albums and cassettes then records them to CDs

By John Fleming

They have been stored away for years, gathering dust in your attic or on the top shelf in your closet. You would never dream of getting rid of them, but you're not sure what else to do with your vintage vinyls and cassettes. You would love to be able to listen to them again, but pulling out the old record player (which may or may not still work) is not worth the hassle. In addition, you don't have a cassette player any longer.

Allow us to offer you a solution to this dilemma in the form of the CD Recorder.

This music system will play your record albums, cassettes, and CDs. It can also bring your vinyl LPs and cassettes into the world of modern music by recording them onto CDs! This ingenious system needs only the push of a button to record your old albums and cassettes to CDs. Once on CD you can listen to this crisp, clean sound in your vehicle, or anywhere you'd like.

This beautifully designed, all-in-one system combines the most modern of components with a retro-style design. The cherry finish cabinet has old-fashioned speaker panels on the front. Also located on the front is an antique brass front panel that contains the LCD display and all the buttons and knobs necessary for each of the three components.

Located at the top of the system, under the lid, is the three-speed turntable that plays 33 1/3s, 45s, and 78s. Place the stylus on your favorite album, sit back, and enjoy the old style and sound of all your long unplayed favorite records.

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Vietnam's annual economic growth of 7–8 percent in recent years has been remarkable, though it has come at the price of rising inequalities, a pattern in many other countries under neoliberalism. Per capita GDP has risen from $200 in 1993 to $835 last year. That's still less than $2 per day for most Vietnamese, but it comes close to removing Vietnam from the World Bank's category of the poorest nations. The Vietnamese government estimated foreign direct investment at $13 billion in 2007, the highest investors being South Korea, the British Virgin Islands (a conduit for offshore Hong Kong money) and Singapore. Poverty has fallen from 58 percent to 20 percent, though the majority of ethnic minorities and rural Vietnamese still live in poverty, and growth has created catastrophic problems of infrastructure, traffic congestion and pollution.

The party introduced its drastic *doi moi* market policies in 1986, a "renovation" plan that opened doors to private foreign investment and a Gorbachev-style internal *perestroika*. An exhaustive European study concluded in 2006 that a remarkable result of the *doi moi* reforms has been "the absence of organized social opposition among workers, peasants and youth. They are generally content with their growing economic opportunities."

Of course, Vietnam is a one-party state that closely monitors the Internet and pockets of dissent among religious and ethnic groups. But the institutional controls have been steadily relaxed since the 1970s, with none of the uprisings that accompanied the fall of Soviet or Eastern European Communism. Nor has there been a Tiananmen Square in Hanoi. "Democratic debate within the party and within the National Assembly, as well as personal freedoms, have made much progress since the war," observes John McAuliffe, a reconstruction specialist who has made an estimated fifty trips to the country. "It's true that it wouldn't be wise to stand up on a soapbox and advocate the overthrow of the government," says Lady Borton, a longtime American expatriate and translator in Hanoi. "But there is widespread criticism of the party leaders"—whom she describes as "bulldogs"—"on all levels in private and in the press." In an observation I shared, Borton described Vietnam as "a place of constant talk, all the time, and they talk freely."

Kent Wong, the director of UCLA's labor studies center, discerns a positive spirit among Vietnam's working class based on taking several union delegations to Vietnam. "I've seen poverty in many developing countries, and Vietnam is different. There are no shantytowns," Wong says. Vietnamese unions, Wong acknowledges, are not constituted as adversarial bargaining units, but the many members he has interviewed have high morale. "Four years ago when I was there, they had a plan to organize 1 million more workers in the public sector, and they actually met the goal," he says. Wide income disparities prevail in the private sector, but inequalities in the public sector are less pronounced. Wong, who wants to turn the AFL-CIO away from its lingering cold war (and CIA-financed) heritage of anti-Communism toward Vietnam and China, is working to build direct worker-to-worker relationships to foster labor solidarity strategies in the age of globalization.

To make sense of the contradictions between Vietnam's grinding poverty and rising affluence, between defeating Americans in war but joining the WTO in peace, one must consider Vietnam's history. Perhaps no country in the modern world has suffered the sorrows of war more heavily and for a longer consecutive period than Vietnam. Leaving out the century of French colonialism, the Vietnamese survived, even prevailed, during the Japanese occupation in World War II, the nine-year war against French reconquest (365,000 battle deaths), the fifteen-year war with the Americans (2.1 million battle deaths) and the ten-year war with Pol Pot's Cambodia and China in the 1980s. Millions of Vietnamese died of famine as well, or lived with hunger and deprivation as everyday experiences. After the American war, at least 38,000 more Vietnamese were killed by unexploded bombs and landmines, and countless numbers continue to live with the deformities resulting from 20 million gallons of dioxin-laced Agent Orange and other defoliants. Their sufferings are beyond Western imagination. All this sacrifice was accepted as either a duty in the war for independence or a reality to be accepted and survived. It was accompanied by the deep personalized pain of Vietnamese killing one another, not simply the French or American invaders. At least 185,000 Saigon soldiers died, for example, dishonored as the losing side.

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Here, perhaps, is the explanation for Vietnam's two-decade quest to achieve something resembling a normal life, to avoid exclusion from the world community. This memory is why they believe normalization with the United States, accession to the WTO and a (nonpermanent) seat on the UN Security Council are strategic "victories" on a long road to recovery. It is a matter of great pride that a Vietnamese Bronze Age drum is placed at the entrance to the UN Security Council today.

"No More War was the lesson after Vietnam for our people," said Bao Ninh, author of *The Sorrow of War*, a 1993 antiwar novel that ranks in my mind with the classics of Remarque, Heller, Vonnegut, Mailer, Tim O'Brien and Philip Caputo among war veterans. We visited Ninh one evening at his Hanoi residence, where he and his wife received us with tea, fruits and cake. His first floor was a bright reception room with a couch, chairs and, in one corner, a motorbike. Ninh's novel was banned at first for allegedly undermining the national consensus that the war had been patriotic, victorious and glorious. But under *doi moi* the book gained a huge audience in Vietnamese and other languages, and this year it is being produced as a film.

When he was 15 in Hanoi, Ninh saw his first American. It was John McCain, parachuting into Truc Bach Lake from his burning fighter-bomber after destroying a power plant. Ninh watched as McCain, drowning with two broken arms, was pulled from the lake by a local fisherman at a spot marked by

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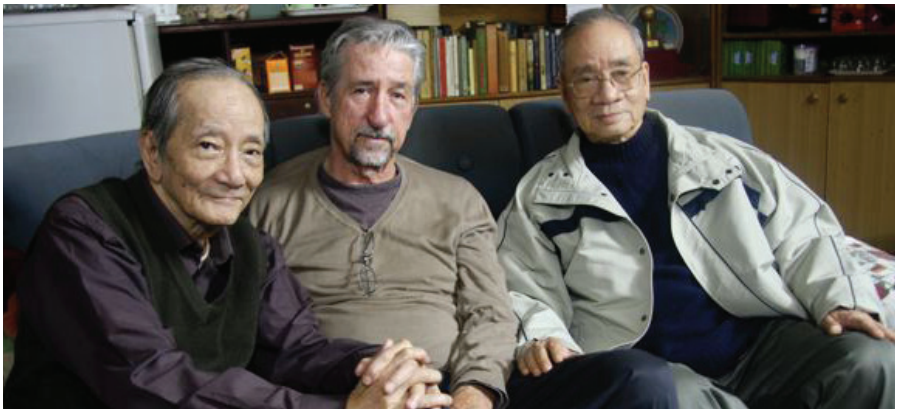
a small monument today. Ninh later joined the army to fight in South Vietnam, was among the soldiers who liberated Saigon in 1975, and searched for the decomposing bodies of dead soldiers after the war. His book is more about man's inhumanity to man than a tale of triumphant revolution. I was stunned at the jacket's description of Ninh as one of only ten survivors of a youth brigade of 500. With a laugh, he surprised me by saying the numbers were made up by his publisher, Pantheon/Random House. "Not only governments but soldiers themselves make up war stories, too," he laughed again, not unlike sardonic American Vietnam veterans. "I like writing.



Do Xuan Oanh, Tom Hayden and Nguyen Trung Hieu

I write about what I know. I wanted to tell a soldier's story, not a political or ideological one."

Ninh visited the United States in 1998 with other Vietnamese writers, gaining an impression of US diversity, including surprise at how many Americans were "quite fat." That aside, even in conservative towns like Missoula, Montana, he found Vietnam memorials and town officials who were veterans like himself. Ninh came away impressed that so many Americans still "remembered, discussed and agonized over Vietnam," and formed the opinion that this memory of Vietnam could be "a tower of strength from the past" on which to build better relations in the future.

Beneath his friendly bearing, Ninh carries the scars and guilt that only some war veterans are capable of expressing. The most painful, perhaps, is his "sorrow at having survived," the belief that the very best of his generation died for Vietnam's present peace:

> Look carefully now at the peace we have, painful, bitter, and sad. And look who won the war. To win, martyrs had sacrificed their lives in order that others might survive. Not a new phenomenon, true. But those still living to know that the kindest, most worthy people have all fallen away, or even been tortured, humiliated before being killed, or buried and wiped away by the machinery of war, then this beautiful landscape of calm and peace is an appalling paradox.

Ninh was repelled by Vietnam's Marxist postwar policies. "In the war, I had lived like an animal. Now I couldn't stand this [the peace]. Some Americans may sympathize with Communism but I lived under it and couldn't stand it. Everybody was fed up with the hardship. That's what led to the *doi moi* in the '80s." One of Bao Ninh's sons is making millions in the global high-tech industry and travels frequently to the United States. It's not the future he fought for at the same age, he says, but he's proud and happy for his son. "We Vietnamese are not like North Korea or China. If Communism doesn't work, we move on. But North Korea, for example, has a very tough time because they keep going on with Communism."

Not many Vietnamese today think of the war with America with Bao Ninh's profound cynicism, for that would mean questioning their country's very identity, much like questioning the Indian wars or the Revolution for Americans. Rather, the American war is perceived as a necessity forced on Vietnam by invading powers, as has happened for more than a thousand years, beginning with the Chinese. Vietnamese take pride in having defeated so many great powers and feel deeply about their losses. There is a suppressed anger that they were willing to join the search for American MIAs while the United States and Monsanto refuse to take responsibility for Agent Orange.

The question is whether the future, aside from the obvious advantages of peace, will be worth the sacrifices of the past. Is the period of anticolonial revolution—which Vietnam symbolized and so dominated our thinking in the '60s and beyond—becoming an obsolete memory in the era of globalization? Has the promise of those inspiring revolutions faded with the decline of naked colonialism and the emergence of so many corrupt authoritarianisms in the Third World? Or are the supposedly scientific models of history long embraced by the left being replaced with a kind of chaos theory of unpredictability? Is this all that was ever possible?

Perhaps this was why I had stayed away so long but had to return after so many decades. Much as I still opposed war and imperialism, from Vietnam to Iraq, I no longer expected joyous endings.

I wanted to see my oldest acquaintances in Vietnam for personal reasons but also as guides in sorting out these troubling questions. I will call these people, now in their 80s, Vietnam's old revolutionary generation. Their roots went back nearly a century, to young Ho Chi Minh's odyssey to the West—in particular, France and America—to study the spirit of republican revolutions for lessons he might bring home. Ho, then known as Nguyen Ai Quoc, presented a petition to the 1919 Versailles conference asking for Vietnam's inclusion in the call for self-determination. There he learned that Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points did not apply to the colonies. In the period of the Russian Revolution, Ho was waiting tables in Harlem and making diary notes on lynchings. He embraced Marxism-Leninism because of Lenin's opposition to colonialism. Twenty-five years later, Ho collaborated with American intelligence agents in resisting the Japanese occupation. Then he cited the US Declaration of Independence in declaring Vietnam's freedom in 1945. From long tradition grew the practical, and even sentimental, belief that the "American people," in Walt Whitman's mythic invocation, could be appealed to against American imperialism.

Thus arose Viet-My (Vietnamese–American) solidarity com-

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mittees and cultural exchanges from the very beginnings of the war with the United States, staffed by bright young Vietnamese who were asked to host American wartime visitors and in the process learned more about American culture and politics. Now long retired, many of these old revolutionaries went on after the war to become diplomats and ambassadors to European countries. These days in Hanoi many still arise at 5:30 for morning exercises at the Flying Dragon Club, an old building with a curved roof, then, with bodies limber and spirits balanced, go out for tea and conversation.

In general, the old revolutionaries are busy, active in community affairs, proud and nationalistic, and shared with me the unanimous sense that Vietnam has become too materialistic and acquisitive. "The new generation lacks a balanced approach," said 81-year-old Nguyen Ngoc Dung, who runs shelters for street children in Ho Chi Minh City. "The situation is out of balance," said one. "They are not looking—how do you say?—at the other side of the coin."

Dung is a former deputy to the most well-known of the old revolutionaries, 81-year-old Nguyen Thi Binh, who presides over the Peace and Development Foundation in Hanoi. During the war, "Madame Binh," as she was known, was a striking global icon and nemesis denounced by Henry Kissinger in the Paris peace negotiations. When she welcomed me for tea, she seemed smaller than the woman I remembered, but the energy remained vibrant. The formality of the reunion was derailed by the arrival of the "two Liams," arm in arm. They sat on her grandmotherly lap while Binh held forth on the challenges of healing the damage of Agent Orange and developing Vietnam past the status of other poor countries. She showed a keen interest in sponsoring workshops with critics of globalization. Meanwhile, the two little Liams lobbied to be taken to the local Lego franchise.

In general, the old revolutionaries are busy, proud and nationalistic, and shared with me the sense that Vietnam had become too materialistic.

On another morning, the sudden arrival of an older man in a blue windbreaker surprised me. He walked toward me peering carefully through wide spectacles. "Do you remember who I am?" he asked with an expectant look. Then he held before me a black-and-white photo of myself, ten pounds lighter and thirty-five years younger, staring at Vietnamese graves, notebook in hand. The man with glasses was Pham Khac Lam, an interpreter and photographer whom I last saw deep within a cave in rural North Vietnam, in 1972.

Lam, now 77, was the top assistant to Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap in preparing the battle plan for Dien Bien Phu in 1954. His father was a mandarin adviser to Emperor Bao Dai, the last Vietnamese king. Lam's father is said to have written Bao Dai's abdication speech in 1945. Lam, in other words, grew up in the absolute center of Vietnamese anticolonialism, joined the solidarity committees during the American war and participated in the postwar process as director of the country's first television network. He was part of the Rose Garden ceremonies when Vietnam's leaders met Presidents Clinton and Bush. He takes modest credit for the idea of flying both Vietnamese and US flags on the stretch limousine that carried Hanoi officials to the White House door. And he once told Civil War buff Ted Turner, who opened media relations between CNN and Hanoi, that "it was important to let the past be 'gone with the wind.'" Turner generously sold Lam the rights to broadcast CNN for a nickel.

Lam edits *Viet-My*, a glossy magazine that seems devoted to promotional reports on commercial and diplomatic ties with the United States, including critical commentary on issues like Agent Orange. Occasionally Lam inserts a strategic analysis of the US quandary in Iraq, buried amid advertisements beckoning tourists to such attractions as health clubs at the beach. How did he really feel, I wondered, about the world he had done so much to shape?

Lam seemed relaxed and diplomatic. His duties have included welcoming former Saigon dictator Nguyen Cao Ky, who has visited Hanoi frequently in recent years, against vociferous complaints from Vietnamese exiles in America. "Ky said that he always wanted to unify Vietnam, so I have to salute him," Lam says wryly. On the question of his country's deepening inequalities, however, Lam parted from the optimistic party line. "The government is trying to reduce poverty, but it's already a reality. The rich are getting richer because they have the means. And the poor don't. We are better off materially, but not mentally, ethically," he said, brushing his forehead.

The world had changed all around him, from the caves of resistance to welcomes in the Rose Garden, from Dien Bien Phu to the global media stage. The geopolitical balance was altered forever with no more Soviet Union or "socialist camp" and tensions simmering beneath the "fraternal relations" with China. "We and the Chinese used to call each other comrade; now it's mister," he reflected wryly. The most ironic piece of the puzzle before me was falling into place. While it could not be said explicitly—and while Vietnam inevitably would strive to maintain close relations with China, its giant northern neighbor—the United States could serve as a strategic balance in Asia for Hanoi, while Vietnam serves as a silent check on the expanding Chinese power Washington fears most. Ironically, it's becoming the domino theory in reverse.

Finally, there was a visit to my oldest friend, Do Xuan Oanh, who first greeted me at Hanoi's airport on a December day forty-two years before. He went through a "bitter period" after retirement, someone told me, but was feeling better, having recently translated into English an edition of Vietnamese women's poetry. He lived alone, his wife having died after many years of illness, his three sons all abroad. As I remembered him, Oanh loved America in unique ways. For example, after learning English from the BBC, he translated *Huckleberry Finn* into Vietnamese, a massive challenge. A musician, he could sing many American protest songs. A romantic, he wept easily and became close to many Americans.

Now, in a carload of old revolutionaries, I traveled along a

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Professor William E. Wallace received his Ph.D. from Columbia University. He has published four books about Michelangelo—one of which received the prestigious Umhoefer Prize for Achievement in the Humanities—and has completed a biography of the artist. He has been the principal consultant on a two-part BBC documentary, *The Divine Michelangelo*. His expertise has received the acknowledgment of the Vatican, which invited him to Rome to join a select group to confer about the delicate conservation of Michelangelo's precious frescos. Professor Wallace is also an extraordinary teacher, as well as the winner of the Governor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, given by Missouri's Coordinating Board for Higher Education

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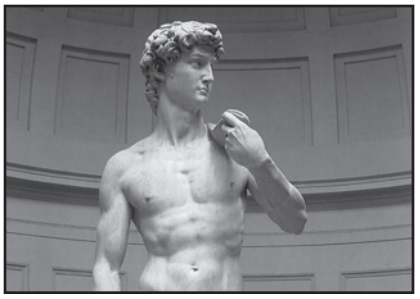

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David by Michelangelo

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narrow cement path past houses, until we came to the gate of Oanh's home of fifty years. He was standing in the door, a thin shadow of the Oanh I remembered. Taking my hand, he led me into a windowless room where a couch and piano were the most prominent fixtures. There were alcoves for painting and a kitchen. We sat and looked at each other. He held my hand on his knee, while the others sat in a quiet circle. It was more a last visit than a time to renew an old conversation.

"Do you want some booze?" Oanh asked with a low chuckle, pointing to a half-bottle of Jim Beam. I deferred, worried what might happen after a few drinks. My wife said Oanh seemed fit and energetic for an 85-year-old. She asked if he would play the piano, and he performed an original piece in a classic European style. He gave me a copy of the song, signed to his "precious friend," and a small carving of a beautiful Vietnamese woman carrying a student briefcase, which he said reminded him of his wife "before the revolution." He repeated the phrase, then relaxed. Gradually, the others began to reminisce about the old days. I wondered if we would ever meet again. I remembered an e-mail from Oanh's son in San Francisco: "I believe God assigned my father and myself to serve the American people." His son would come for a visit in the summer, Oanh said.

We walked back along the dark path to the street filled with motorbikes and strolling couples out for a coffee. Oanh looked at me intently, pointing a finger for emphasis. "Nothing can be predicted," were his last words before we said goodbye. ■

Is Iran Winning the Iraq War?

Maybe—but most Iraqis mistrust Iran just as much as they do the United States.

by ROBERT DREYFUSS

In October, as part of its ongoing effort to isolate and sanction Iran, the Bush Administration announced sanctions against several Iranian banks, companies and individuals linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its special operations unit, the Quds (Jerusalem) Force, for their "support for terrorism." The White House launched a worldwide effort to persuade other countries not to do business with the designees, including Iran's Bank Melli. "Bank Melli provides banking services to the IRGC and the Qods Force," said the Treasury Department. "Entities owned or controlled by the IRGC or the Qods Force use Bank Melli for a variety of financial services."

Buried deep in the State and Treasury Department documents compiled in support of the sanctions—unnoticed by the media—is the address of a Bank Melli branch in a country occupied by US troops: "Location: No. 111-27, Alley 929 District, Arasat Street, Baghdad, Iraq."

That a bank described by the United States as an Iranian facilitator of terrorism operates freely in the heart of Iraq's capital is ironic, to say the least, given the Bush Administration's near-declaration of war against Iran's involvement in Iraq. Citing evidence that Iran supplies arms, money, logistical help and training to Shiite militias and insurgents, hawks in the Administration, including Vice President Cheney, have suggested that US forces in Iraq may strike supply lines, training camps and weapons depots across the Iranian border, even at the risk of igniting all-out war.

Despite its very public saber-rattling against Iran, however, the United States has spent most of the past five years in a de facto alliance with Iran in support of the Shiite-led (and US-installed) regime in Baghdad. The most powerful component of that regime, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and its disciplined Badr Corps militia, is also Iran's closest Iraqi ally. Taking advantage of the political vacuum created by the US destruction of Saddam Hussein's government, Tehran has established a vast presence, both overt and covert, in Iraq, with enormous influence among nearly all of its western neighbor's Shiite and Kurdish parties. "The American military occupation of Iraq has facilitated an Iranian political occupation of Iraq," says Chas Freeman, a former US ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

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Mahdi Army militiamen celebrate the withdrawal of British troops from Basra last fall.

As a result, the Iraq of 2008 is a tale of two paradoxes.

The first paradox, at once startling and ironic, is that Washington's decision to topple Saddam's government has put in place a ruling elite that is far closer to Iran than it is to the United States. As a result, the ayatollahs in Tehran have adroitly checkmated (a word derived from the Persian *shah mat*, "the king is dead") US efforts to install a compliant, pro-American regime in Baghdad as the anchor of Washington's interests in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. Now a proxy conflict between the United States and Iran is playing out on Iraq's complex chess-

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board. Depending on the course that US-Iranian relations take over the rest of Bush's tenure and the start of the next administration in Washington, Tehran has two options. If US-Iran ties improve, Tehran may try, at least in the short term, to broker a deal to stabilize Iraq, albeit one that fortifies the Shiite-led government in a way that accommodates Iran's regional interests. Or, if relations with the United States worsen, Iran can use its allies and agents in Iraq to end the relative calm and send the country tumbling back into all-out civil war.

The second paradox is that despite Iran's enormous influence in Iraq, most Iraqis—even most Iraqi Shiites—are not pro-Iran. On the contrary, underneath the ruling alliance in Baghdad, there is a fierce undercurrent of Arab nationalism in Iraq that opposes both the US occupation and Iran's support for religious parties in Iraq. In recent months, this nationalism has begun to express itself in many ways, from the national outpouring of support for the country's victorious soccer team last summer to the potent anger provoked by efforts to privatize Iraq's oil industry, by the Blackwater security firm's shooting of civilians in a Baghdad traffic circle and by suggestions in Washington that Iraq ought to be partitioned into three ministates. In addition, many Iraqi Shiites, like Iraqi Sunnis, harbor bitter feelings against their Persian neighbor left over from the bloody 1980–88 war, which left hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead. "There is such a thing as Iraqi nationalism, and the default position tends to be one of hostility toward Iran," says Freeman. "Removing the US occupation as the focus of nationalism will almost certainly lead to a renewal of that nationalism's focus on Iran."

Meanwhile, as Iran competes with the United States for influence in Iraq, Tehran is hedging its bets beyond ISCI, building up an impressive portfolio of political, economic, religious and military holdings in its western neighbor. There is a steadily increasing trade, including a black market, across the Iran-Iraq border, and the Iranian government and its state-owned entities have made significant investments in and loans to Iraqi businesses and the rebuilding of Shiite holy cities. There are longstanding clerical ties between Qom, Iran, and Najaf, Iraq, and tens of thousands of religious pilgrims—no doubt including more than a few Iranian intelligence officers—cross the border every month. In March Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad plans to make the first state visit by an Iranian leader to Baghdad.

"The Iranians are investing in virtually every faction there is, just to be sure that once the dust settles, whoever is in control of Iraq is beholden to Iran to a certain extent," says Trita Parsi, author of *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the U.S.* Adds Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institution, "Iran is putting money on every number of the roulette wheel."

Whose Man in Baghdad?

Iran's influence in Iraq begins with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (formerly known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI, which changed its name last year) and its armed wing, the paramilitary Badr Corps. Today ISCI operates a well-oiled political and military machine: it is the cornerstone of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's government, dominates much of the army and the police, controls the holy city of Najaf and holds the governorships and the provincial councils in most of Iraq's southern provinces.

Before, during and after the US invasion of Iraq, SCIRI's ties to Iran were well-known to US officials. But the Bush Administration—relying on the advice of exiled leader of the Iraqi National Congress and neocon poster boy Ahmad Chalabi that postinvasion Iraq would be a secular democracy that would welcome US forces—chose to ignore the Iranian connection. Created in 1982 by Iranian intelligence at the start of the Iran-Iraq war, SCIRI was led by two brothers, Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim and Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim; the latter is now ISCI's chief. The construction of SCIRI under the Hakims was overseen by Ali Khamenei, then Iran's president and now its supreme leader. The Hakims forcibly recruited Iraqi POWs at camps in Iran to create the Badr Corps, which was controlled by Iranian military and intelligence services. It was known as the IRGC's Ninth Badr Corps.

After the 2003 US invasion, amid the chaos and looting that followed the collapse of Saddam's regime, SCIRI and Badr forces flooded across the Iranian border into Iraq. "Border control was nonexistent," says Wayne White, who in 2003 headed the Iraq team at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. "The Iranians could just drive across.... They would come in convoys, ten trucks at a time." Ali Allawi, a postwar Iraqi defense minister and author of *The Occupation of Iraq*, wrote, "About 10,000 trained and disciplined Badr fighters entered Iraq, either unarmed or armed only with light weapons, and reassembled in various towns and cities as the fighting arm of SCIRI." (Other estimates involve significantly higher numbers.) Lavishly financed by Iran, SCIRI and Badr installed their leaders within days in ad hoc posts in Baquba, Kut and other key junctions in the south. Wary of Iran, but seeing little alternative to the turban-wearing clerics of SCIRI and Badr, US and British occupation authorities put the party's officials into top positions. From the early, US-selected Iraqi Governing Council in 2003 onward, Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim was named to a succession of key leadership posts, and top SCIRI officials were installed in various ministries, the police and the army. In the Shiite-dominated south SCIRI officials were named to run provincial authorities, cities and towns. They were viewed by the United States and Britain as natural allies in the struggle against remnants of the Baath Party and the burgeoning Sunni resistance—precisely the forces that Iran, too, saw as its deadliest foes.

Virtually en masse, Badr officers were recruited to the fledgling Iraqi police and army that were being assembled by the United States. According to Raed Jarrar, the Iraq consultant for the American Friends Service Committee, Badr officers maintained their same ranks when they were inducted into the Iraqi security forces. A particularly nasty part of Badr's work in Iraq from 2003 to the present has been the operation of death squads. Often, such units were run directly by Iraq's Interior Ministry, whose Badr-controlled police were blamed for assassinating hundreds of former government officials, ex-military and intelligence officers, and civilian professionals, according to widespread media reports. "I was told in the summer of 2003 in Tehran that the change in regime in Baghdad had allowed Iranian intelligence to identify every single individual who had worked in the Iran section of the Iraqi intelligence service," says Mahan Abedin, director of research at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism in London.

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"They were able to get as much detail as possible about their person, their movement, their connections, their mobile number. All that information was collected." They were eradicated, Abedin says, in a "hidden war."

"Right after the fall of Saddam, [the United States] went looking for the Iraqi intelligence operatives whose target was Iran," says Judith Yaphe, a former CIA Iraq specialist. "If you're Iran, or very pro-Iranian, you're not going to like those guys, are you? We wanted to use them, and Iran wanted to get rid of them. And there's only one way to get rid of them." Anxious not to allow the United States to make common cause with these operatives, Tehran used its muscle to wipe them out.

Evidence of direct Iranian involvement in ISCI-linked death squads is hard to come by. Certainly, ties between ISCI and Iran's Revolutionary Guard are ongoing. As recently as December 2006, two leaders of the secret Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard were seized by US forces inside the Baghdad compound of Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim, in the home of Hadi al-Ameri, the ISCI official who is the commander of the Badr Corps. And US military leaders in Iraq recognize ISCI's Iranian connections. "I think we're all pretty well aware of the potential ties there," says a senior US military officer in Baghdad. But, he says, as long as the Badr militia isn't shooting at Americans, the party's ties to Iran will be tolerated.

The United States has also shown its willingness to tolerate ISCI's record of horrific abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture and illegal prisons. "The U.S. reportedly has evidence implicating SCIRI members in death squad activity, but has been reluctant to use it," says a November 2007 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), citing US military sources.

The Internal Shiite War

Especially over the past three years, a great deal of ISCI's lethality has been directed toward Muqtada al-Sadr's bloc and his powerful militia, the Mahdi Army, or Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM). From the suburbs of Baghdad, to Najaf and Karbala, to Diwaniya, Amarah and Basra, ISCI has been engaged in a bloody confrontation with the JAM, its chief rival among Iraq's Shiite population. And in the Badr versus Sadr fight, the United States has unequivocally supported ISCI. "The real struggle in the long term is between SCIRI and the Sadrists," says Joost Hiltermann of the ICG. "And the Americans have in fact chosen the SCIRI side in this." In so doing, they've chosen to side with a pro-Iran party against a movement that is, despite some ties to Iran, far more independent-minded than ISCI. Paradoxically, that's pushed Sadr closer to Iran.

The Sadr-Badr rivalry is intensified by the fact that both Sadr and Hakim are scions of legendary Iraqi clerical families. When the Hakims fled Iraq, taking up residence in Iran during the era of Saddam, the Sadrs stayed in Iraq. Because it was sponsored by Tehran, Hakim's ISCI is viewed suspiciously by most Iraqis, while Sadr's less organized movement—built mosque by mosque, underground, before, during and after the US invasion—has much deeper roots in Iraq. Their constituencies are different, too, breaking down clearly along class lines. Hakim represents the urban elite and Shiite Iraq's business and commercial class, and his party's leadership has much in common with the merchants, traders and bazaaris who are the backbone of the ruling elite in Iran. Sadr, on the other hand, has the undying loyalty of Iraq's Shiite underclass and urban poor, and he has gained the support of many former Shiite Baathists and Arab nationalists who felt they had nowhere else to go after the overthrow of Saddam.

Although the US tactical alliance with ISCI has been in place since 2003, the joint US-ISCI campaign against Sadr escalated dramatically only last year, after President Bush announced the US troop surge. In that January 2007 speech, Bush explicitly warned Iran that it was the target. "We will disrupt the attacks on our forces," he said. "We'll interrupt the flow of support from Iran.... And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq." But when the United States started talking about "Iranian-backed" forces in Iraq, it didn't mean ISCI; it meant Sadr and the JAM, especially so-called JAM Special Groups, or what the US military started calling "bad JAM." According to the Pentagon, the JAM, or elements of it, were attacking US forces in Iraq with Iranian-made armor-piercing explosives and training JAM militiamen to use precisely targeted mortars and rockets to attack the fortified Green Zone in central Baghdad.

Sadr, a wily nationalist, tried to hold both the United States and Iran at arm's length in the first years of the occupation, but the past eighteen months of unrelenting American-ISCI military pressure has left him little choice other than to seek help from Iran. Sensing that the surge would lead to an onslaught against his forces, last February Sadr ordered the JAM to stand down, and he himself went into hiding. According to David Satterfield, the State Department's senior adviser on Iraq, Sadr has spent most of the past fifteen months in Iran. A February 2008 ICG report described a significant shift in Sadr's rhetoric on Iran, which had been stridently anti-Iranian until recently. "Muqtada al-Sadr used to stick to a nationalist line. Now, one could describe his rhetoric as almost pro-Iranian," a Sadrist leader told the ICG. "Even the Mahdi Army has shifted its tone. Last year's anti-Iranian discourse has given way to something quite different."

Across the south, despite Sadr's intent to lie low, a Badr-Sadr battle raged. The Badr forces, often in the form of Iraqi army and police units, mercilessly suppressed the JAM. American and Badr forces fought side by side against Sadr's less well-armed ragtag militias. Dozens of JAM cells were broken up and hundreds of people were killed or arrested. In Baghdad and provincial capitals like Diwaniya—where a series of large-scale raids on the JAM occurred—US forces as often as not found themselves being used by ISCI to hammer Sadr. "When Sadrists are arrested, they claim that pro-ISCI people are behind arrests," says Reidar Visser of the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, who has written extensively on the political struggles in Iraq's south.

"The Badrists are basically using the United States as a tool to weaken the Sadrists," says Peter Harling of the ICG. "We hear reports across the board of Badrists in neighborhoods denouncing whoever is related to the Sadrist movement to the United States. A number of people, including people who are hostile to the Sadrist movement, say that the Badrists are out in the field, doing the intelligence work and pointing the United States in what they say is the right direction—that is, against Sadrist elements. And the United States is not very discriminating in sorting out its enemies."

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"The United States is being played," agrees Kenneth Katzman, Middle East specialist for the Congressional Research Service. "The US military is being played by the Hakims in this internecine struggle."

Tehran Weighs Its Options

Iran is constantly evaluating its options in this intra-Shiite struggle. Although Iran is closest to ISCI, Tehran's leaders may be worried about the party's long-term viability. Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim has lung cancer—last year he spent many weeks in Iran for treatment—and his son and likely successor, Amar al-Hakim, is young and inexperienced. In addition, Iran is well aware that many Iraqi Shiites, who fought against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, despise ISCI as traitors. "They're hated," says Hiltermann, who has studied ISCI closely. So despite Sadr's nationalist inclinations and his apparent distaste for the Iranian leadership, Iran has sought to build ties to the upstart cleric.

Iran's efforts to cultivate ties with Sadr, and vice versa, operate on two levels: first, directly with Sadr and his top lieutenants; and second, by reaching deep into Sadr's JAM militia. With an estimated 60,000 men under arms, the JAM is not a disciplined fighting force but a loosely organized, franchise-like network of armed gangs in towns and neighborhoods. Sensing an opportunity to take advantage of this lack of discipline, Iran launched a systematic effort to win the allegiance of local and regional JAM commanders, according to a wide range of analysts. Iran's goal may have been to turn the JAM into a version of Lebanon's Hezbollah, dependent on Iran for arms and money.

The so-called Special Groups emerged, according to the Pentagon, as a catch-all rubric for Sadrist fighters who, starting about a year ago, emerged as the deadliest foes of US occupation forces. After tens of thousands of former Sunni resistance fighters joined the Anbar Province *Sahwa* ("Awakening") militia under the command of Iraqi tribal chiefs—part of a pronounced US tilt toward the Sunnis in Iraq in 2006—the United States began to battle a wave of attacks in Shiite areas south and east of Baghdad by hard-line Shiites who opposed the US-Sunni accord. By mid-2007 these insurgents were responsible for three-fourths of the casualties inflicted on American troops, according to the US military. The Pentagon called the attackers "Iranian-backed JAM Special Groups" and accused them of using highly effective armor-piercing bombs manufactured in Iran called "explosively formed penetrators."

Nearly all analysts interviewed for this story believe that Iran has supplied at least some of the weapons being used by Shiite insurgents, although the physical evidence presented by the Pentagon was less than overwhelming. "I don't think we've got a lot of intelligence about what Iran is really doing," says David Mack of the Middle East Institute, who twice served as a diplomat in Iraq during his career. "We see the effects of certain kinds of weapons that arguably were made in Iran." The Pentagon admits that so far it has failed to intercept any shipments crossing the Iranian border into Iraq. But the military insists that Iran is involved, and it says that US and Iraqi forces have captured numerous fighters trained in Iran and at least one top Hezbollah

A man from the west will fight over three things: water, women and gold, and usually in that order.

- Senator Barry Goldwater

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commander from Lebanon. Some skeptics of the Pentagon's claims suggest that Iranian weapons that find their way into Iraq are being smuggled by independent or rogue elements of the IRGC Quds Force without Supreme Leader Khamenei's knowledge, but that seems unlikely. Mahan Abedin calls the idea "ludicrous," adding, "If the IRGC is doing anything in Iraq, that would be officially sanctioned. When it comes to matters of such importance, there is no scope for behaving outside well-established parameters. Make no mistake about that. The IRGC is a highly disciplined organization. It's an ideological force, and a lot of thinking and planning has gone into its hierarchy. It is a highly surveilled organization, controlled very tightly."

Though willing to blame Iran and elements of the JAM, the US command in Iraq is careful not to blame Sadr himself.

'Both Iran and Sadr read the surge the same way.... Why confront the Americans at peak strength?' —Wayne White, former US diplomat

According to Rear Adm. Gregory Smith, the communications division chief of the multinational forces in Iraq, Iraqi agents of Iran tapped small groups of Iraqis, twenty to forty at a time, to be sent across the border into Iran. "They were trained and then sent back in these quote-unquote 'Special Groups,'" he says. "They were sent back as small cells.... They would wind up a lot of little toy monsters. They sent them across the border and started turning them loose." Although many of these cells, scattered through Baghdad, Diyala and the south, called themselves followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, the precise degree of their loyalty to Sadr's organization is impossible to measure. The US military, at least, considers them distinct. "What happened was, eventually, they completely separated from Muqtada al-Sadr's JAM and they are operating as a rogue element outside of JAM and outside of Sadr's control," says Smith.

By late summer, Sadr's movement had suffered great losses and seemed to be in deep trouble. Whether rogue or not, the Special Groups were under heavy attack by a joint US-Iraqi offensive. Clashes with the more disciplined and better-armed Badr Corps were also taking a toll among Sadr's forces. In late August a climactic battle between JAM and Badr forces in Karbala, Iraq's second-holiest shrine city, left scores dead, and as many as 500 Sadrists were arrested. Within days, Sadr declared a unilateral six-month cease-fire.

The cease-fire came at an opportune moment for Sadr. In contrast to Badr-linked death squads, which were blamed for precisely targeted killings, at least some of Sadr's deputies and commanders had been tied to horrific violence against Sunnis in ethnic cleansing campaigns, especially in Baghdad, often behaving more like gangsters than a political army. The cease-fire gave Sadr the opportunity to reign in the most undisciplined elements.

It's unclear exactly what motivated Sadr to declare the cease-fire, but its effect was electric. Not only did Sadr's forces lay down their arms but violence linked to the Special Groups fell off dramatically, too. Casualties among Americans, which had reached near zero in Sunni Anbar Province because of the Awakening movement, fell precipitously in the capital and southern Iraq. A few weeks later, in October, Sadr and Hakim signed a shaky peace agreement, one that was reportedly brokered by Iran. "According to [the pan-Arab daily] *Al Hayat*, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei was present when the accord between Sadr and Hakim in October was reached," says Sam Parker, an Iraq expert at the US Institute of Peace. (By mid-February the agreement had apparently collapsed.)

The fact that both the JAM and the Special Groups simultaneously observed the cease-fire announced by Sadr could mean that the supposedly rogue units in the JAM are not so rogue at all. "It tells me that [Sadr] has more control than we think," says Wayne White. Another possibility is that, quietly and behind the scenes, Iran used its influence—including a cutoff in the supply of arms and money—to restrain Shiite fighters. "I think there is a robust relationship now between Sadr and the Iranians," says White. "Both Iran and Sadr read the surge the same way. Thousands... fled south from Baghdad to Shia sanctuaries or to Iran.... They just decamped. Why confront the Americans at peak strength? They can just wait for the American surge forces to leave." Indeed, an extensive recent report in the *Christian Science Monitor* suggested that Sadr is using the lull to consolidate his militia. And he has created a special force, the so-called Golden Ones, to enforce JAM discipline.

US-Iran Détente?

By last fall, top US officials had begun cautiously praising Sadrists for their forbearance. The Pentagon, which had spent most of last year blaming "JAM Special Groups," dropped all references to the JAM and lavished praise on Sadr's cease-fire. Gen. David Petraeus, commander of US forces in Iraq, lauded Sadr personally for "working to rid his movement of criminal elements" and for making a "pledge of honor" to uphold the cease-fire announced in August. "The Sadr trend stands for service to the people," said Petraeus. And despite the fact that Sadr won't meet directly with US officials, a senior US officer in Baghdad told *The Nation* that the United States is in direct dialogue with leading Sadrists. "We've got ways in which we have opportunities to have discussion about overall, well, I don't want to say strategy, but—intent," he said.

Even more surprising, perhaps, top US officials also began to praise Iran. Beginning late last summer, according to American officials, Iran began restricting the flow of weapons across the Iraqi border, following a pledge by Supreme Leader Khamenei to Maliki during the Iraqi prime minister's trip to Tehran. The State Department's Satterfield said last December, "We have seen such a consistent and sustained diminution in certain kinds of violence by certain kinds of folks that we can't explain it solely [by internal factors in Iraq].... We are confident that decisions involving the strategy pursued by the IRGC are made at the most senior levels of the Iranian government." In February Satterfield tempered his comments a bit, suggesting that Iran might be behind an uptick in rocket and mortar attacks in Basra.

There were other straws in the wind indicating the possibility of US-Iranian détente in Iraq. Ambassador Ryan Crocker an-

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nounced in Baghdad that he would soon resume his dialogue with Iran's Ambassador Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, a top officer in the IRGC who'd helped organize the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon. There are rumors of stepped-up clandestine contacts between US and Iranian officials in various locations. And the US intelligence community's National Intelligence Estimate, released late last year, eased US pressure on Iran by revealing that Tehran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003. None other than Ali Khamenei responded by saying, for the first time, that he could envision "having relations with America."

When *The Nation* asked US officers in Iraq about Iran's growing role there, the response was decidedly mild. "Obviously Iran has legitimate economic, political and diplomatic interests in Iraq that they ought to pursue, whether it's helping to generate power in the south or building up an Iraq here that they're comfortable with," said a senior US officer in Baghdad. "But what we're not going to tolerate is the direct militant-aligned activity that Iran has been responsible for." He went on: "They are going to be neighbors forever. They share a huge common border. Economic life across that border is pretty significant. And if all that takes place in an open and transparent way, there's no downside to it."

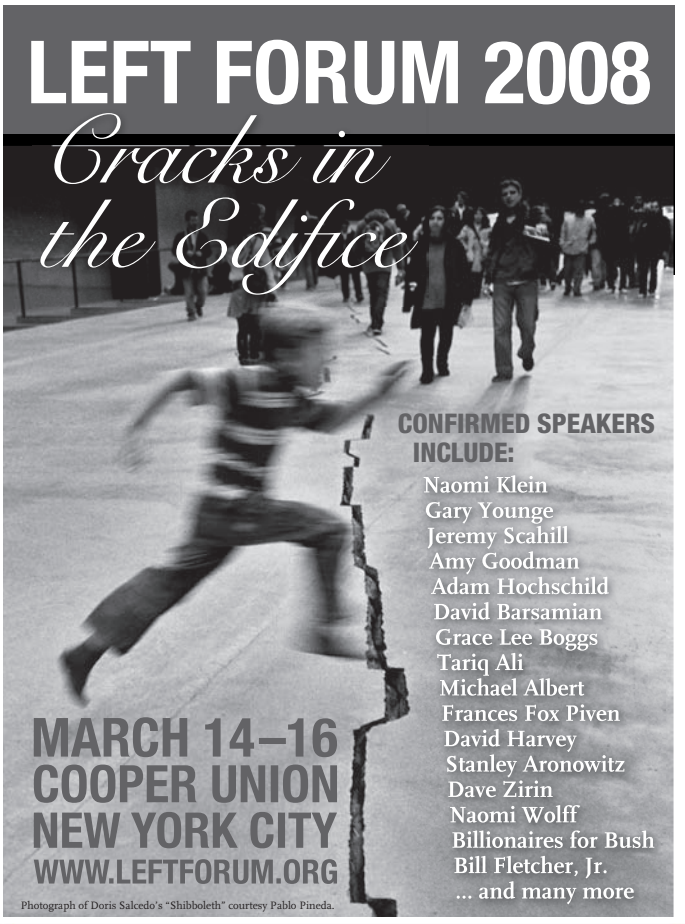
Can the United States make a deal with Iran to stabilize Iraq, with both Washington and Tehran ignoring their differences to support Maliki's government? Possibly. One scenario would have Washington, backed by Saudi Arabia, using its influence among the Sunnis, particularly in the burgeoning Awakening movement, to bring them to the table, while Iran would use its clout among the Shiites to convince Maliki and Hakim to make the concessions necessary to bridge the sectarian divide. That idea lay at the heart of the Iraq Study Group plan, the 2006 advisory panel chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton that Bush dismissed when he adopted the surge. The Baker-Hamilton plan called for negotiations with Iran (and Syria) to help stabilize Iraq.

But enormous obstacles remain.

First, Iran is very unhappy about America's efforts to build up the 100,000-strong Sunni Awakening militia. In an interview last fall with CNN, Ambassador Kazemi-Qomi explicitly warned against the US policy of arming the Sunnis, accusing Washington of "bringing back to power former killers and murderers." Instead, Kazemi-Qomi demanded that the United States continue to support the Badr-linked Iraqi security forces. "The United States should arm and help the government, the army and the police." Soon afterward, a wave of assassinations began to hit the leadership of the Awakening militia and, according to the *New York Times*, although Al Qaeda in Iraq is to blame for some of the killings, many of the assassins were drawn from the Badr Corps.

Second, recent Al Qaeda–style terrorist activity in and around Baghdad and continuing pressure on the JAM from Badr-linked Iraqi army and police units have prompted Sadr to warn that he might lift the cease-fire when it expires at the end of February. That could end the current relative calm in Iraq, just as surge-linked US brigades begin withdrawing.

Perhaps most important, Iraqi nationalists are already expressing their disdain for the idea of a US-Iran pact in Iraq. Iraqi nationalists—among them secular parties, Baathists, many Sunni parties, the Awakening movement and key Shiite blocs, including the Sadrists, despite their recent tilt toward Iran—are



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starting to coalesce around a program built on opposition to both the US military occupation and the Iranian political occupation. In addition, they are opposed to Al Qaeda and to separatists, especially the Kurds, who want an independent Kurdish region in the north, and to ISCI, which has called for a quasi-independent Shiite region in the south. If the United States were to begin a rapid drawdown of its forces in Iraq, chances are good that Iraqi nationalism would begin to reassert itself. In the end, many analysts say, the Iraqis will limit Iran's influence in Iraq—but only if the United States gets out of the way. ■

Transforming the Liberal Checklist

It's time for progressives to demand a bolder, "transformational" politics.

by ERIC SCHNEIDERMAN

Check off the boxes, copy the paragraph from two years ago, mail it in. As an election year approaches, I again face the piles of questionnaires that progressive organizations use to evaluate public officials. Environmentalists, feminists, campaign finance reformers, housing advocates and labor unions have all come to rely on these lists of our positions—often on issues that never even come up for a vote. It should come as no surprise that, for the most part, all we get out of this cumbersome process is a long line of "checklist liberals" who answer correctly but do little to advance the progressive causes that underlie the questionnaires.

I respectfully suggest that if we want to move beyond short-term efforts to slow down the bone-crushing machinery of the contemporary conservative movement and begin to build a meaningful movement of our own, we need to expand the job descriptions of our elected officials. To do this, we must consider the two distinct aspects of our work: transactional politics and transformational politics.

Transactional politics is pretty straightforward. What's the best deal I can get on a gun-control or immigration-reform bill during this year's legislative session? What do I have to do to elect a good progressive ally in November? Transactional politics requires us to be pragmatic about current realities and the state of public opinion. It's all about getting the best result possible given the circumstances here and now.

Transformational politics is the work we do today to ensure that the deal we can get on gun control or immigration reform in a year—or five years, or twenty years—will be better than the deal we can get today. Transformational politics requires us to challenge the way people think about issues, opening their minds to better possibilities. It requires us to root out the assumptions about politics or economics or human nature that prevent us from embracing policies that will make our lives better. Transformational politics has been a critical element of American political life since Lincoln was advocating his "oft expressed belief that a leader should endeavor to transform, yet heed, public opinion."

The need for a renewed focus on transformational politics is obvious when we compare the success of the conservative movement over the past thirty years with the collapse of the American progressive coalition. The important thing about contemporary conservatives is not just that they won elections—it's how they won. They didn't win by changing their positions or rhetoric to move toward the voters—or where polls told them the voters were. They won by moving the voters closer to them, paving the way for the last decade of conservative hegemony.

In 1977 most Americans didn't think government was the problem. Neoclassical economics was not our national faith. A serious presidential candidate couldn't denounce the theory of evolution. The profound changes in public opinion on these and other issues were brought about by the conservatives' excellent work at transformational politics. And they didn't just do it. They honored it. They celebrated it. And an entire generation of Democratic consultants made millions by advising their clients to stay away from it.

Think about the transformation of America's ideas about taxes over the past thirty years. There has never been any credible evidence that "supply side" policies promote growth, but the relentless advocacy of this peculiar theory has radically shifted most Americans' basic view of taxes. The history of Grover Norquist's antitax crusade is well-known. It features all the essential elements of transformational politics: identify a set of assumptions that control the public's understanding of an issue; develop a language and message to shift those assumptions; maintain a sustained, disciplined effort to bring about that change over a period of years. From the Laffer curve to the Americans for Tax Reform's Taxpayer Protection Pledge, which all candidates were asked to sign—regardless of whether they would actually have to vote on tax reform anytime soon—Norquist mobilized a bipartisan phalanx of elected officials to preach the gospel of tax cuts. And lo and behold, what had once been considered "politically impossible" became inevitable.

Now let's compare the honors and "access" heaped on Norquist and his colleagues with the way most Democrats have treated transformational work. In 1980 a young Senator Al Gore held the first Congressional hearings on global warming. He challenged the fundamental framework for debates about environmental policy, which too often went something like "clean air and water versus faster economic growth." He offered a new way to think about the relationship between progressive economic policies and the environment. Virtually every Democratic official backed away.

During his 2000 presidential campaign, amid a growing body of evidence supporting his arguments, Gore actually abandoned his transformational stance. He took the advice of the "consul-

Eric Schneiderman, a progressive activist and lawyer, is currently serving as a New York State Senator representing Manhattan and the Bronx.

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tant class" and retreated to his transactional checklist. In fact, as Stephanie Mencimer wrote in *The Washington Monthly*, "as early as 1997, people inside and out of the [Clinton] White House were urging Gore to steer clear of contentious environmental issues as he positioned himself to run for president. They did not see his visionary efforts on climate change as an asset, but as a huge liability that could galvanize formidable opposition to his candidacy should he actively promote it."

As a state legislator, I deal with the devastating effects of the right's transformational work every day. When I first got to Albany, I received a T-shirt, a cup and a toothbrush from a "tort reform" group, all emblazoned with the slogan TRIAL LAWYERS: THEY DON'T MAKE THE THINGS YOU USE, THEY MAKE THE THINGS YOU USE MORE EXPENSIVE. I have seen the NRA work on the public's perception of gun control from Buffalo to the Bronx to stop us from passing legislation to ensure that gun store employees receive proper training and that gun dealers are held accountable for knowingly selling guns to criminals. Last year, after one of the gun lobby's mobilizations, my office was flooded with critical e-mails from New Yorkers who had been convinced that legislation to keep guns out of the hands of the mentally ill and convicted felons was a threat to their right to own a hunting rifle.

Let's face facts. Very few checklist liberals will focus on transformational work if they are rewarded or punished only for their transactional work. Questionnaires capture how we vote or promise to vote, and our voting is often predetermined by manipulations of the legislative calendar. For example, legislators often get permission to cast a "checklist" vote against a bill once the legislative leadership has assembled enough votes to ensure that it will pass.

So here's a proposal to inspire a transformational focus by our candidates. On every issue, with every group of activists, politicians who claim to be doing transformational work should be required to prove it. All politicians who seek your support should produce articles, videos, transcripts—anything that demonstrates that they are challenging the conservative assumptions that frame virtually all discussions of public policy among America's elected officials. How do we talk about abortion? As a duel between "prochoice" and "prolife" extremists—or as an issue of basic human freedom for women denied the power to control their own bodies? What do we say about health insurance? That it requires a delicate balance between the free market and socialism—or that it is an essential investment in our most important national resource and a basic right, without which our commitment to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is meaningless?

Here in New York, where we have one of the most regressive tax systems in America, we are finally confronting the trauma produced by decades of right-wing transformational work on this central pillar of the common good. And, I believe, the analysis and language we need to change the debate over taxes is ready and waiting for us. In *All Together Now: Common Sense for a Fair Economy* Jared Bernstein provides a simple but devastating framework for attacking the neoclassical economic

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assumptions of Reaganomics. Bernstein's catchy narrative is based on an understanding of the economy as a collective endeavor (We're in this together) that can and should displace the Hobbesian basis for economic life proffered by conservatives (You're on your own). Bernstein's framework should be as regular a part of Democratic rhetoric as the mantra of "low taxes produce economic growth" is for Republicans.

Then there's Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, who has concisely refuted the Bushism that "it's your money." He points out that, in fact, taxes are the government's money, with which we pay for the government services provided to us. Baker points out that anytime someone doesn't pay his fair share of taxes, others have to pay more. The loophole-loving scofflaw is in effect stealing from those who pay their honest share.

The point of the transformational/transactional paradigm is not for everyone to be singing the same ode to change all the time, but for every would-be progressive official to pursue transformational themes as a central part of our conversation with our constituents and colleagues. We will never overcome decades of brilliant conservative propaganda on the economy until our representatives begin to reflect the basic ideas of Bernstein, Baker, Paul Krugman and Robert Reich in our stump speeches to political clubs and our talks at senior centers.

Finally, this is not a proposal to abandon the day-to-day struggles of transactional politics, which are still a central part of our work. Nor is it a proposal for self-immolation. Progressive candidates in tough races or in swing districts may not always be able to lead in transformational politics (although many conservative warriors displayed such self-sacrifice in the course of their movement's march to conquest). But most Democratic officials are in very safe districts, and they should be pressured to pursue transformational as well as transactional work.

The good news in all this is that because conservatives have pushed their agenda beyond most people's sense of decency or reason, pol-friendly opportunities for progressive transformational work are all around us. House Ways and Means chair Charlie Rangel's comprehensive tax reform plan provides an opening to focus on who gains and who loses under our current tax code. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's sweeping new urban environmental proposal (PLANYC) and Congressman Jerry Nadler's dogged advocacy for a rail freight system in the city offer the opportunity to move the debate over the future of American urban life away from the elitist narrative of think tanks like the Manhattan Institute and toward a case for shared investment in our infrastructure.

Almost all of us are capable of taking examples of good public policy and placing them in a transformational progressive framework. But history teaches that the overwhelming majority of elected officials follow movement builders outside government when it comes to the new and risky. So it's time for progressive activists to focus their demands on transformational as well as transactional work. Once you recognize it, demand it and reward it, it will happen. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

Isserman Replies

Clinton, N.Y.

Penelope Rosemont blurs the distinction between the nonviolent strategy advocated by such pacifists as Dr. King, Dave Dellinger and Barbara Deming and the terrorism of the Weather Underground, the subject of my review. In examining the complexities of Cathy Wilkerson's political evolution, I suggested that both pacifism and Weatherman, in a sense, could be traced to the same tradition of a conscience-driven moral politics. But the results were quite different, weren't they? As Wilkerson writes, she and her comrades in the Weather Underground "accepted the same desanctification of human life practiced by Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and William Westmoreland." The same cannot be said of King, Dellinger or Deming.

William Berry asserts that the Weather Underground's bombing campaign "caused Nixon and Kissinger…to limit their criminal enterprise." I think Nixon and Kissinger welcomed the Underground's activities for the opportunity it provided them to paint war opponents as mindless, dangerous, anti-American terrorists. If the Weathermen had been better bomb makers and had set off their nail-studded dynamite bomb at Fort Dix as they planned, they would have destroyed the mass democratic, nonviolent antiwar movement. I do not understand the rancid nostalgia for Weatherman one finds in odd musty corners of the left, among "radical elders" and some of the young activists they unfortunately seem to influence.

Jim Williams, like Carl Oglesby, represents another "road not taken" by SDS in its latter days, when I was involved. I wish I had paid more attention to such voices of sanity at the time.

Maurice Isserman

Bella

Englewood, N.J.

Thanks to Nona Willis Aronowitz for "Bella's Way," her review of the oral history of Bella Abzug [Feb. 4]. I would like to add that in the early years of the antiwar movement Bella rejected suggestions that she run for office, instead putting her energy, and that of Women Strike for Peace, into promoting our program through peace candidates like Ted Weiss and Ed Koch. I suspect that Bella was wary of having her left-wing background exposed during a campaign, as well as producing a sexist backlash. When she did enter politics these issues surfaced, and they taxed her and her supporters greatly.

Carol Kaplan

Deer Isle, Me.

My introduction to women in politics and a lifetime of feminism began when, with only four phrases of Spanish, I worked the Lower East Side of New York to build crowds for Bella's first Congressional race. She was a dazzling force of nature in the early decades of women's activism, inspiring strong women's leadership in reproductive rights, economic equity, violence prevention, human rights and, eventually, international development.

Tough, passionate, driven, strategic and funny, Bella pushed us all to be independent and work harder than we ever imagined possible. Indeed, she personified leadership, freedom and choice for women. My commitment to electing Barack Obama as the next President comes out of that legacy. Thank you, Bella.

Lael Stegall

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Books & the Arts.

AP PHOTO/FERNANDO LLANO

President Hugo Chávez shows Venezuela's Constitution during a speech in Caracas after being freed by his military captors, Sunday, April 14, 2002.

Chávez's Fix

by DANIEL WILKINSON

Last year, President Hugo Chávez staked much of his considerable political capital on a national referendum featuring sixty-nine proposed amendments to Venezuela's Constitution. Given that Chávez had won all five national votes he'd faced since he took office in 1999, including the 2006 presidential election, when he garnered 63 percent of the vote, the referendum's defeat in December was a dramatic turnaround. But the outcome was actually the best thing that could have happened, if not for Chávez himself then certainly for the "Bolivarian" movement he has led for more than a decade.

The referendum was the most recent flashpoint in the often high-stakes and always high-decibel struggle that has raged for years between Chávez's supporters and his critics, with each side fully convinced that it is protecting Venezuelan democracy from the other. Unfortunately, the substance of their competing claims has been largely drowned out by polemics that reduce the country's complex political dynamics to a single question: is Chávez a dictator or a democrat? Those who say "dictator" see a military strongman who has exploited high oil prices to buy political support—at home through clientelistic social programs, abroad through gratuitous jabs at an unpopular US President—while seizing control of the country's political institutions. Those who say "democrat" see a charismatic leader of a vibrant popular movement intent on deepening democracy—in Venezuela by empowering the poor, abroad by defying the political and economic dogmas of Washington and Wall Street on behalf of the entire region.

Daniel Wilkinson covers Latin America for Human Rights Watch and is the author of Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala.

Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era
Class, Polarization and Conflict.
Edited by Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger.
L. Rienner. 259 pp. $22.50.

The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela
Edited by Jennifer L. McCoy and David J. Myers.
Johns Hopkins. 352 pp. $25.

Del Viernes Negro al Referendo Revocatorio
By Margarita López Maya.
Alfadil. 383 pp. 65 bolívares.

Changing Venezuela by Taking Power
The History and Policies of the Chávez Government.
By Gregory Wilpert.
Verso. 312 pp. $26.95.

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Given the deep disenchantment with democratic institutions that exists throughout much of Latin America today, the political transformation under way in Venezuela deserves to be the subject of a vigorous regional debate. Instead what we've gotten has been more like a shouting match, with the Washington-Caracas mudslinging topping the international headlines. Donald Rumsfeld compares Chávez to Hitler, George H.W. Bush calls him an ass, Pat Robertson calls for his assassination. Chávez, meanwhile, denounces George W. Bush as an assassin, a coward, a drunk, a donkey, a birdie and, most famously, the devil. Condoleezza Rice calls Chávez a tyrant who is "really, really destroying his own country"; Chávez quips that Rice is an illiterate in need of a husband.

One casualty of the Caracazo was political scientists' rosy view of Venezuelan democracy.

Predictably, the diatribes avoid the many knotty questions about Chávez and his presidency. If he is such a dictator, why has he won so many internationally validated elections? Why have his opponents remained so vocal and active? And why was the opposition able to defeat him in the 2007 referendum? Conversely, if Chávez is such a democrat, why has he embraced Fidel Castro—a full-fledged authoritarian who, for decades, imprisoned his critics and quashed internal dissent—as his mentor and model? Why has he aggressively undermined the independence of the Venezuelan judiciary and concentrated power so heavily in the president's office? And why, most recently, did he use the referendum to seek sweeping powers to suspend due process rights in times of emergency?

The failed referendum did not end the polemics. But for the many, more sober observers caught in the middle, it did help to clarify the actual state of Venezuelan democracy. Chávez's defeat was proof that Venezuela today is not a dictatorship. Still, the authoritarian tendencies of Chávez's government, while exaggerated by some of his critics, are very real. His supporters may excuse them as responses to the problem of political exclusion that is, undoubtedly, a more fundamental threat to democracy throughout the region. But unless those authoritarian tendencies are curbed, the Bolivarian dream of overcoming this exclusion will almost certainly remain unfulfilled.

Like most Latin Americans, Venezuelans know all about exclusion. Yet unlike most others, they tend to associate it with the political system touted elsewhere as its most promising antidote: representative democracy. The reason is historical: during the 1980s and '90s, when other countries in the region were making tortured transitions away from military dictatorship or one-party rule, Venezuelans were stuck with a standard three-branch, two-party democracy that was, by all accounts, a disaster.

Venezuela's pre-Chávez system was put in place in 1958 through a power-sharing pact between the two mainstream parties (as well as a third, small leftist party) that aimed to prevent the sort of concentration of power that had given rise to a military dictatorship ten years earlier. For several decades it had served as the poster child for democracy in the region—at least among political scientists who specialized in the subject. In his introduction to *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era*, historian Steve Ellner identifies the supposedly "positive aspects" that earned the respect of (mostly) foreign academics. It was a two-party system in which the parties were highly institutionalized, with multiclass membership and predominantly middle-class leaders who eschewed sectarian attitudes, ideological agendas and ultranationalistic rhetoric, and who were willing and able to resolve their differences through interparty agreements. This arrangement—according to the democracy experts—is what allowed Venezuela to escape the extreme polarization and violence ravaging the rest of the continent at the time.

But then one morning in February 1989, the model democracy exploded. The proximate cause was a hike in gasoline prices, which prompted a hike in bus fares that in turn provoked angry reactions from would-be passengers throughout Caracas and in cities around the country. Spontaneous street demonstrations erupted into riots and rampant looting. After a delayed and fumbling response, the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez sent troops into the streets to restore order, which they managed to do only after killing hundreds of civilians, mostly by means of extrajudicial executions.

Among the casualties of the Caracazo, as the four days of violence came to be known, was the political scientists' rosy view of Venezuelan democracy. As Ellner writes, those factors previously seen as the system's virtues were now understood to be its vices. The parties' excessive influence had stunted civil society; their multiclass membership prevented them from effectively representing the interests of the country's lower-class majorities; and their penchant for interparty pacts had papered over the deep and growing polarization that would be, from that moment forward, the defining feature of Venezuelan politics.

A rich and illuminating postmortem on the region's democratic poster child can be found in the compilations edited by Ellner and fellow American academic Daniel Hellinger, and by Jennifer McCoy and David Myers, as well as the essay collection by Venezuelan historian Margarita López Maya. While varying somewhat in emphasis and content, all three tell essentially the same story: how an economic crisis collided with a political one to create a perfect storm of popular discontent.

Venezuelan democracy had thrived on the distribution of oil revenues through a system of clientelism that fostered dependency and corruption but benefited almost everyone, at least through the '70s. So long as petrodollars were available to underwrite generous subsidies for powerful interest groups and ambitious social programs for the lower classes, there was no need for the governing elite to develop effective policies for the regulation and redistribution of oil wealth. But in the early '80s, a drop in oil prices, combined with a hike in international borrowing costs, sent the economy into a twenty-year decline. From 1975 through 1995, the percentage of the population living in poverty more than tripled, from 17 to 65 percent. Successive administrations responded to the economic crisis with adjustments such as the reduction of state subsidies and capital controls and devaluation of the bolívar, whose design reflected extensive consultation with international creditors but virtually none with the population that would suffer their harsh consequences. The result was the profound sense of betrayal among the country's lower classes that fueled the Caracazo in 1989.

The Caracazo also revealed the severity of the country's political dysfunction. As López Maya observes, it caught the country's democratic leaders off guard because they were largely disconnected from the people they supposedly "represented." I was reminded of the gulf between those two Venezuelas during one of several trips I took to Caracas last year. One evening I drove into the densely populated hills of Catia, in western Caracas, with Andrés Antillano, a community organizer and university professor. "These communities have been here for decades, but until recently they didn't exist, at least not

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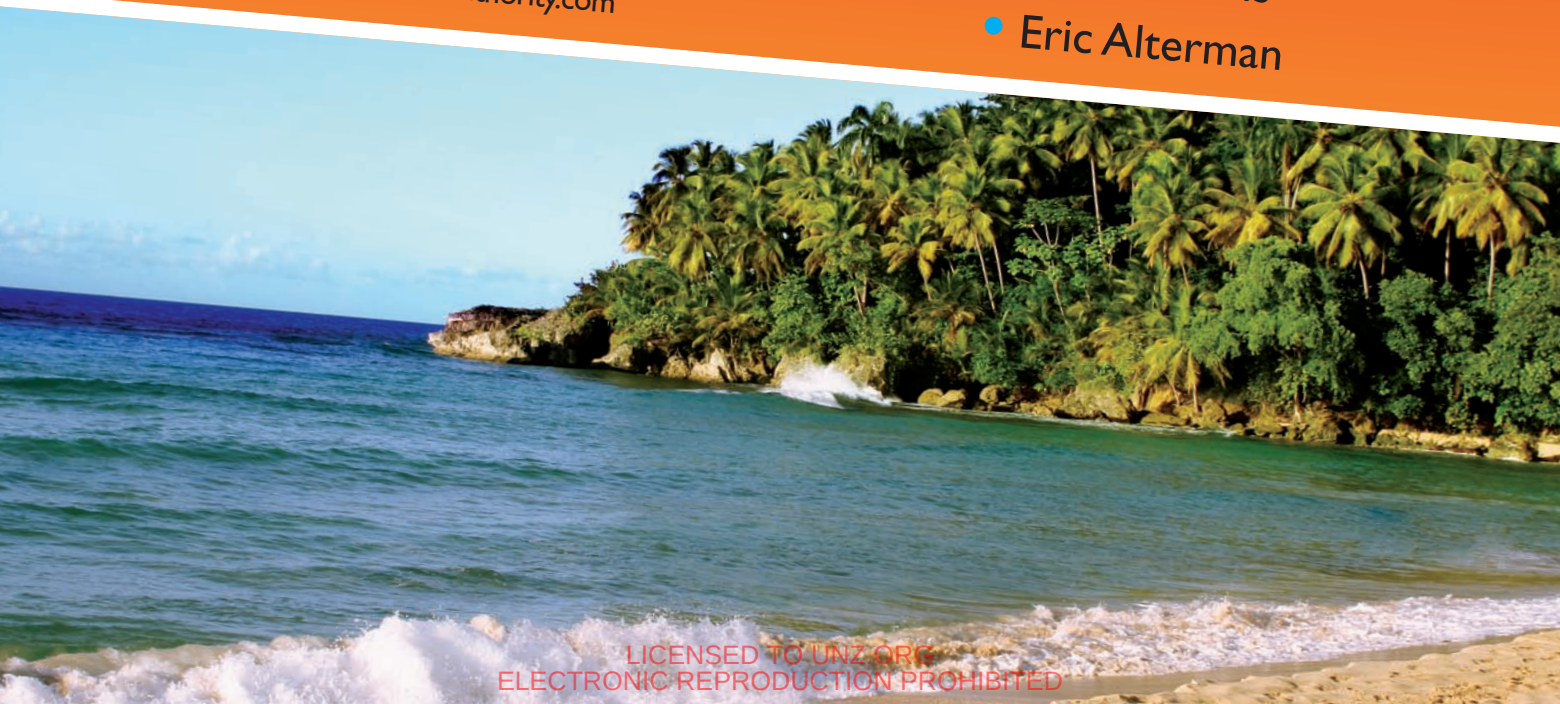

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officially," Antillano explained. "The roads in here weren't on the city maps. The properties weren't titled. Many people didn't even have birth certificates. In some areas, there was no electricity, no water, no basic services. The only state presence was the police." Considering that the state was accustomed to treating the country's poor as invisibles, is it any surprise that it didn't anticipate the scope of their discontent in 1989 or solve their problems once they were exposed?

AP PHOTO/FERNANDO LLANO

An October 2002 march celebrated Chávez's return to power.

Hugo Chávez stepped onto the country's political stage amid the post-Caracazo social strife. In February 1992 Lieutenant Colonel Chávez and nearly 200 other army officers launched a coup d'état that left scores of civilian casualties and failed to topple the government. Facing certain defeat, Chávez exchanged his gun for what the world now knows to be his most potent weapon: a microphone. The Pérez government allowed the lieutenant colonel to appear on national television to call off the coup and instruct his fellow conspirators to surrender. Once on air, however, the telegenic Chávez did something more: he assumed personal responsibility for the rebellion and hinted that he might try to foment another. Chávez had managed to turn a military disaster into a spectacular media triumph that catapulted him from the obscure ranks of discontented junior officers into the center of the country's political imagination. One minute of television exposure was enough to make him a standard-bearer for the change that the majority of Venezuelans, and the poor especially, craved.

Chávez had served two years in jail for the coup attempt when he was set free in 1994 by a grant of amnesty from the newly elected President Rafael Caldera. Chávez joined the growing ranks of community organizers and activists who were working to transform the political system just as the Caldera government was launching a third wave of neoliberal reforms (such as privatization of state industries, state spending cuts and exchange-rate liberalization) and the country was enduring one of the largest increases in inequality in the world. The continuing economic and political crises set the stage for the 1998 presidential election, which Chávez would win running as the ultimate outsider. The only political experience on his résumé was his involvement in the failed coup.

Once in office, Chávez never stopped campaigning. In his inaugural address he called on the Venezuelan people to join him in a "Bolivarian Revolution" (named after Venezuela's political patron saint, Simón Bolívar, who led the wars of independence against Spain in the nineteenth century); as his first official act he called a national referendum to convene a constituent assembly to write a new Constitution. Chávez would spend much of his first year in office rallying support for this project, and in December 1999 Venezuelans voted overwhelmingly to enact the new Bolivarian Constitution, which "refounded" the republic as a "participatory" democracy in which the state is obligated to promote the "participation of the people in the formation, execution, and control of public administration."

Gregory Wilpert's *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand this Bolivarian Revolution on its own terms. Wilpert, an American sociologist and journalist who edits the pro-Chávez website venezuelanalysis.com, provides a comprehensive, nuanced and insightful assessment of the government's policies, examining what they have accomplished and where they have fallen short. Chávez's most popular innovation has been his massive investment in new social programs. Rather than rely on dysfunctional state institutions to administer these programs, Chávez decided in 2003 to circumvent them, launching a series of "missions" accountable directly to the president's office alone. The missions employ volunteers, temporary workers and foreign professionals to provide poor communities like those in the hills of Catia with the basic services the state failed for years to deliver. The most popular of these missions are health posts in poor communities staffed by at least 10,000 Cuban medics. Several others have focused on education, providing preschool to tens of thousands of children as well as elementary education to millions of adults.

Expensive social programs are nothing new to Venezuela. President Carlos Andrés Pérez's grandiose attempt to create "Great Venezuela" during the oil boom of the 1970s saw billions lavished on free healthcare, universal public education and massive public works programs. What is new, Wilpert writes, is the effort to give participants a voice in how the programs are run. Local health and education committees have assisted the work of the missions by coordinating their outreach within communities, water committees have collaborated with the state water company to increase and improve service and land committees have led efforts to title properties in poor neighborhoods. Over the past two years, about 18,000 "community councils" have been established, according to government figures, to coordinate these existing committees, draft community development plans and implement projects to address local needs.

Chávez calls this process an "explosion of popular power," and the community councils the "essence" of a new "twenty-first-century socialism." His government has put its money where his mouth is, according to Wilpert. Last year, the government reported allocating $1.5 billion in grants to more than 12,000 councils for local projects, ranging from the formation of communal banks and medical posts to the repair of streets and sewage systems. It says it will spend another $2 billion in 2008.

It's difficult to know how many of these committees and councils are fully functional or how active community participation really is. One "popular assembly" I witnessed last year was attended by more than forty neighbors, yet only two of them

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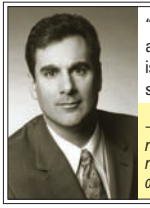

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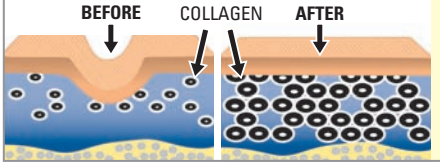

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spoke up during the one-hour session. Another had a much smaller turnout but far more participation. What is clear is that this process has been a transformative experience for some barrio residents who do participate. Adelaida Rodriguez, a 56-year-old with a fourth-grade education, approached me after one of these meetings to tell me her story. "Before, I was too timid to speak out about these issues," she said. Rodriguez was now attending school and leading local efforts to obtain state financing to build a neighborhood cultural center for children. "It's all thanks to President Chávez that I'm here."

REUTERS/EDWIN MONTILVA

Puppets on the roof of a car during a rally in Caracas to support Chávez's referendum, November 2007

The "explosion" of popular power hasn't been triggered entirely from above. Local leaders and community groups have played an important role in propelling it forward in a variety of areas, including the public airwaves. After decades of being shut out by the mainstream media, a network of local activists seized upon Chávez's 1998 triumph to promote community radio stations. They worked with Chavista legislators to draft legislation on alternative media that is among the most advanced in the hemisphere. Where other governments generally ignore or actively discourage community radio stations, Venezuela's new law established the state's duty to support them by granting licenses and providing seed capital, infrastructure grants and training. Today there are more than 270 community radio stations licensed and operating in Venezuela.

If Chávez is promoting broader political participation in Venezuela, then how has he come to be regarded by so many in Venezuela and in many parts of the Americas as a dictator in the making? Part of the answer is undoubtedly the misinformation circulated by some of his opponents. As Wilpert points out, Chávez was being labeled a leftist dictator long before he had consolidated presidential power or, for that matter, done anything particularly leftist, such as redistributing land and oil wealth. The accusations initially came from Venezuelan elites who resented being excluded from power for the first time in their lives. At the same time, Chávez did help feed his strongman persona by filling top posts with military officers while routinely taking over the airwaves to berate his critics with tirades and inflammatory epithets—"weaklings," "rancid oligarchs," "traitors."

Some Chávez supporters insist the president's belligerent tone has merely echoed the opposition's. But this defense of Chávez sells him short. Chávez's success has resulted precisely from his ability to pick fights and win them. Whereas previous governments had sought, unsuccessfully, to contain the fires of discontent, Chávez has thrown gas on the flames in hopes of burning the old system down. As a Chávez supporter in a poor neighborhood in Caracas told me, "Chávez didn't divide Venezuelans. We were already divided. If the other side didn't realize it, that's because their media had covered it up by ignoring the rest of us."

The fact that Chávez's opponents didn't fully grasp this division reflects a basic irony of recent Venezuelan history: those who had built and sustained the old system of exclusion would ultimately become its victims. Isolated in their own echo chamber, the country's elite would prove as unprepared for Chávez as they had been for the Caracazo. And their isolation would contribute to the colossal miscalculations their leaders would make as they repeatedly sought to oust their democratically elected president from office over the next several years.

These efforts included the unsuccessful coup of April 11, 2002; a strike at PDVSA, the state oil company, later that year aimed at forcing Chávez's resignation; and the national referendum to recall Chávez as president in 2004. At each turn the opposition underestimated both the popularity and political acumen of the president, who egged them on with insults, exploited their outrage (and outrageousness) to rally his base and outmaneuvered their leadership with a tactical savvy reminiscent of Muhammad Ali rope-a-doping a powerful rival in the ring. Each effort to oust Chávez served only to fortify his presidency. The 2002 coup provided him with a rationale for purging the army, which would prove crucial for surviving the PDVSA strike later that year. The strike, in turn, provided him with a rationale for purging PDVSA and then channeling oil revenues into popular social programs, a move that repaid itself with the landslide "no" vote in the 2004 recall referendum. And the 2004 referendum's endorsement of Chávez's presidency prompted a demoralized opposition to withdraw from congressional elections the next year, thereby assuring that the legislature would be made up entirely of Chávez supporters.

There's nothing intrinsically undemocratic about a civilian president controlling a country's armed forces or its national oil company. In fact, establishing civilian control of the military has been one of the key challenges facing democracies throughout Latin America in recent decades. What is troubling, however, is when a democratic government openly advocates political discrimination within these and other state institutions, as Chávez and his ministers have repeatedly done. A month before the 2006 election, for example, two private TV stations broadcast a video in which Rafael Ramírez, the head of PDVSA and energy minister, tells employees to give up their jobs if they don't support Chávez. Rather than criticize the speech, Chávez publicly urged Ramírez to "repeat it one hundred times a day" and then called upon all oil workers and military personnel to "go

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away to Miami" if they were not "with the revolution."

These were hardly idle threats, as Ramírez made clear in his speech, warning employees, "We removed 19,500 enemies of the country from this business and we're ready to keep doing it." Ramírez was referring to PDVSA workers who had been summarily fired after the 2002 oil strike and then blacklisted from future employment in the energy sector. Many other Venezuelans found themselves blacklisted in 2004 when they signed the petition to hold the recall referendum against Chávez. After the petition was submitted to the National Electoral Council, Chávez instructed this supposedly autonomous agency to release their names to a Chavista congressman, Luis Tascón, who posted them online. The resulting "Tascón List" was then used by government officials to exclude Chávez opponents from jobs and services. The official reason for the list was to help weed out fraudulent signatures, while the official justification for the mass firing of oil workers was that their strike had been an act of "sabotage" that severely damaged the country's economy. Whatever the justifications, however, the lesson drawn by many Venezuelans was that opposition to Chávez could cost them their livelihoods.

The most well-known case of political discrimination is Chávez's decision not to renew the license of the main opposition TV station, which resulted in its removal from the public airwaves last May. Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) was one of four private channels that used to provide uniformly antigovernment programming, most notably during the 2002 coup, when it urged viewers to join opposition protests and then blacked out news coverage when the coup began to unravel. Subsequently, the two other stations with national coverage dropped their partisan programming. (The fourth, which has remained critical, is a twenty-four-hour news station with far more limited viewership.)

Chávez's supporters defended the RCTV decision by pointing out, correctly, that the station's broadcast license was expiring. They also argued that its support of the 2002 coup provided ample grounds for the government not to renew its license. Yet what was disquieting wasn't the decision so much as how it was rendered. The government singled out RCTV for condemnation at the same time that it renewed the license of a station that had supported the 2002 coup but subsequently dropped critical coverage of Chávez. And it denied RCTV's owners any form of due process to contest the charges against them. Moreover, Chávez chose to present the decision as an overtly punitive and politically motivated one. And, for good measure, he did so in a nationally televised speech, standing in military dress before rows of troops and declaring that his government would no longer tolerate private media that were "against the people, against the nation, against national independence and against the dignity of the Republic!"

Why the unnecessary provocation? It may have been, as Chávez's critics argue, an attempt to intimidate the remaining opposition media into toning down their criticism. After all, he had wielded the threat of nonrenewing concessions in the past in response to critical coverage. (After stations broadcast the video of his energy minister's discriminatory speech, Chávez publicly warned them, "Don't be surprised when I tell you, 'There are no more concessions.'") Or maybe it was the contrary: Chávez wanted more criticism, not less. Until then, provoking the opposition had been like hitting a political piñata: the harder Chávez struck, the more electoral candy he got. (If that was the rationale, it may have been the worst miscalculation of his presidency, as the RCTV closure helped spawn an opposition student movement that would play a decisive role in his defeat in the December referendum.)

Yet multiple interviews with seasoned Chavistas led me to still another explanation, one that strikes me as the most interesting for what it suggests about Chávez's approach to democracy. All the years under the old regime had instilled in Chávez and his entourage an abiding distrust of the sort of institutional procedures that could have guaranteed RCTV a fair hearing. Even when they control the institutions that administer those procedures, they still don't trust them.

This profound distrust of government institutions is shared by many Venezuelans, especially those who voted Chávez into office in 1998 largely on his promise to repair the country's dysfunctional democracy. But once the Chávez camp came to power, the predominant attitude within its ranks seems to have morphed from distrust into outright disregard. One glaring example is the "enabling" law that Congress passed in January 2007, which effectively surrenders the body's legislative role to the president for eighteen months by granting him the power to pass laws by decree, subject only to an up-or-down vote in Congress.

Even more troubling has been Chávez's handling of the country's judiciary. A main plank of his 1998 campaign was the promise to rid the courts of rampant corruption and political interference. The Chávez government created a historic opportunity to do so with its 1999 Constitution, which created a new Supreme Court and established strong protections for judicial independence, such as the requirement of a two-thirds majority vote of Congress to impeach a sitting justice. But once this new court's rulings began to manifest the same divide that had polarized the country—with the justices split equally for and against Chávez—the Chávez camp abandoned these protections and launched a takeover. In May 2004, the Chavista-led Congress passed a law that added twelve seats to the twenty-member Supreme Court and created new mechanisms—in flagrant violation of the 1999 Constitution—to remove sitting justices.

In 2004, Venezuela's Congress passed a law enabling Chávez to pack the courts to his liking.

The results were predictable. Congress filled the new seats with committed Chavistas, including Luis Velásquez Alvaray, a main sponsor of the court-packing law, who proceeded to fire hundreds of lower-court judges, only to be removed from the bench two years later by means of one of the unconstitutional measures he had helped design (he was subsequently impeached). The official reason for the justice's removal was corruption. The real reason—the justice claimed in a dramatic news conference before fleeing the country—was that he had resisted pressure from members of Chávez's cabinet to fire a judge on political grounds.

The principal justification for the court-packing legislation had been a 2002 Supreme Court ruling that absolved military officers of their role in the April 11 coup against Chávez on the absurd grounds that what had occurred on that day was not a coup d'état. And the new, packed court promptly overruled that earlier decision in March 2005. Yet remarkably, six years after the coup, no one has been successfully prosecuted for his role in removing Chávez (and thanks to an amnesty Chávez announced in December, it looks like no one will be). But then again, it did not help that the same Chavista Congress that expressed such outrage at the court's attempt to deny the reality of the coup had itself rejected calls for an independent truth commission

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that could have determined, once and for all, what actually happened on April 11, 2002.

For more than five years, Chávez has exploited the events of April 11 much the same way Bush has exploited September 11: as a basis for expanding executive power. The coup has provided the main justification for purging the military, packing the Supreme Court, removing RCTV from the public airwaves and, most recently, proposing a constitutional amendment that would empower the president to suspend due process rights indefinitely. Chávez and his supporters have repeatedly condemned presumed coup supporters in the court of public opinion but have shown less interest in trying them in a court of law. In this sense, they have proven themselves to be, like many of their opponents, more concerned with pursuing power than promoting the rule of law.

Of course, concepts like "the rule of law" and "due process" have often been manipulated, in Venezuela and elsewhere, to perpetuate political exclusion. A degree of distrust of such concepts is understandable and perhaps even healthy, especially if it encourages efforts to promote effective new forms of democratic accountability. Venezuela's "participatory democracy" seeks to do just that through something called the "social audit," one of the more appealing notions of the Bolivarian project, which has been incorporated into a variety of laws governing public administration in recent years. The aim is to allow ordinary citizens and community organizations to monitor government agencies and programs rather than passively depending on institutional mechanisms to hold officials accountable for them. It is a role that Chávez supporters I've spoken with clearly relish.

It's one thing to criticize the Chávez government, however, and another to criticize Chávez. During my visits to several Caracas barrios last year, I repeatedly heard Chávez supporters vigorously denounce the corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement of government programs but argue in the same breath that Chávez himself wasn't to blame. The problem, they insisted, was that state institutions remain bloated with bureaucrats from the "old regime," or that the president's cohorts aren't cut from the same revolutionary cloth as their leader. What's more, they pointed to these failings as reasons for granting Chávez more power, not less. Chávez, it would seem, has succeeded in molding a persona out of a material more potent than Teflon. Complaints about his government don't just bounce off him. They make him stronger.

The real test of how powerful the new "popular power" actually is may come the day any of these community groups becomes disenchanted with the president. Right now, it's unclear how far most would go in challenging Chávez, since they depend on the president's office to certify their community councils, approve their projects and allocate the bulk of their funding. In fact, such dependency is a major weakness of the current model of "participatory" democracy in Venezuela, and eradicating it would require granting the councils greater political and financial autonomy. But even if they were more autonomous, how would local councils actually challenge state power? How could any community-level organization prevail against a powerful national president? Realistically, the only way would be by turning to other powerful state institutions for protection or support.

But in today's Venezuela, where would they turn? The courts? The 2004 court-packing neutralized the judiciary as an independent branch of government. The Congress? Since the opposition's 2005 electoral boycott, the legislature has been controlled almost entirely by Chávez supporters who, as Chávez has publicly observed, owe their seats to their affiliation with him. What about labor unions? While the Chávez government has encouraged the formation of new labor organizations, it has also systematically undermined union independence—according to the International Labor Organization—by interfering in union elections, creating obstacles to collective bargaining and discriminating against non-Chavista unions. It may be true, as Chávez supporters argue, that these institutions are no more politicized than they were before Chávez. But this fact—however useful it may be for exposing the double standards of some of his critics—is small consolation for the people who need these institutions to promote their interests and protect their rights.

This, then, is the second major weakness of Venezuela's new "participatory" democracy: the old institutions associated with "representative democracy" remain as weak and dependent as ever. The Bolivarians were right that their country's democracy was incomplete without more effective mechanisms for direct participation. But the obverse is also true: participatory democracy doesn't truly empower people in the absence of strong, independent institutions through which citizens can assert their rights against the state itself.

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I know Chávez supporters who understand this. But there clearly are some who don't, and Chávez himself appears to be one of them. He has lambasted Chavista labor leaders who insist that their unions remain politically independent, inveighing against what he calls the "venom of autonomy" within organized labor. He has assailed Chavista politicians who refused to merge their own parties into a single socialist party, denouncing them publicly as "counterrevolutionaries" who, by questioning his efforts, had joined the "opposition." He has attacked Chavistas who would seek "to neutralize decisions of the revolution, through a judge, or a court, or even in the very Supreme Court, behind the back of the leader of the revolution, acting from the inside against the revolution." In a nationally televised speech, Chávez bellowed that such judicial challenges would be considered "treason against the people, treason against the revolution!"

In another country, such talk of treason might portend political prisons and clandestine graves. But this is Venezuela, where hyperbole is a local inflection; and this is Chávez, whose policies are rarely as violent as his verbal barrages. Still, the president's bully-boy tactics do have consequences. On the positive side, they may have helped to bring down a decrepit old regime by exposing suppressed political differences and propelling people to take sides. Yet they can also have the far more unsavory consequence of suppressing differences and silencing dissent. Such an impact has already been felt in some communities, according to Bolivarian activists I spoke with in Caracas last year, feeding what Wilpert calls a "personalistic politics" in which "faithfulness to the Bolivarian project, loyalty to Chávez and uncritical acceptance of all of Chávez's policies are seen to be one and the same thing." Andrés Antillano, the veteran organizer who drove me through the hills of Catia, described his frustration at repeatedly hearing people at community assemblies cite Chávez's declarations to silence neighbors who had offered opinions different from their own. "This is supposed to be about their views, not Chávez's," he said. Antillano insists that the Chávez presidency has created unprecedented possibilities for empowering the country's poor. But he has mixed feelings about the president's role today: "The great paradox here is that the same leader who played such a critical role in launching and promoting this democratic process could end up being the one who puts the brakes on it."

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At its core, the 2007 referendum was all about power. The sixty-nine constitutional amendments proposed by Chávez and his supporters in Congress contained a wide range of disparate measures, some of them quite progressive, such as a prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. But the main thrust of the referendum was a transfer of state power. The question still being debated in Venezuela today is: transfer to whom?

For Chávez and his supporters, the referendum was a means to empower "the people." But the clearest beneficiary would have been the executive branch. For starters, presidential term limits would have been abolished, making it possible for Chávez to pursue his declared goal of remaining president for another fifty years. Chávez supporters argued that indefinite re-election would be "more democratic," as it would allow the electorate to decide how many terms a president would serve. But Chávez torpedoed this talking point when he explained why the proposal to abolish term limits would not apply to other elected officials. Term limits were needed, he insisted, to prevent these office holders from becoming "caudillos."

Another amendment would have allowed the president to create new federal provinces, cities, districts and defense regions anywhere in the country, and to handpick the officials who govern them. In theory, these new jurisdictions would coexist with already established ones. Yet given the wealth and power of the national government, these appointees could easily be used by the president to supplant the authority of democratically elected state governors and mayors.

A third amendment—a clear threat to human rights—would have granted the president sweeping emergency powers, including the power to indefinitely suspend basic due process guarantees, such as the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial. It would have made it possible, in other words, during states of emergency, to sentence people to lengthy prison terms without having to prove they had committed any crime. Moreover, this amendment would have eliminated the requirement that an emergency had to exist for a state of emergency to be declared. Instead, the mere "possibility" of a "situation capable of generating" an emergency would suffice. While Congress would still have to approve emergency decrees, it would no longer be able to revoke them once they were in place. The amendment would have also eliminated time limits on states of emergency, thus allowing the president to maintain them indefinitely. It would have removed the requirement that emergency decrees suspending rights be approved by the Supreme Court and comply with international human rights treaties (which allow the suspension of some rights during states of emergencies, but only temporarily, and never allow suspension of basic guarantees like presumption of innocence and fair trials).

Chávez supporters justified these emergency powers by invoking April 11. In their minds, the failed coup is a grim reminder that democratic governments must be able to protect themselves from enemies determined to destroy them. Of course, unlike others who employ such formulas (such as the Bush Administration in Guantánamo Bay or the Castros on the rest of Cuba), the Chávez government is to date not guilty of systematically imprisoning people without due process. Chávez supporters pointed to this comparatively clean record when defending the proposal. But their defense raises the question: if Chávez wasn't inclined to engage in such abuses, why did his supporters go to such lengths to empower him to do so?

As for "power to the people," the reforms would have enshrined the concept of "popular power" in the text of the Constitution, creating a "fourth level" of government. It would have given constitutional recognition to community councils, workers' councils, fishermen's councils and half a dozen other councils, as well as cooperatives and communes, through which this "popular power" would be exercised. One amendment would have guaranteed that at least 5 percent of the federal budget be set aside for these mechanisms. Another would have mandated the passage of legislation that would authorize the councils to engage in an array of administrative functions currently carried out by state and municipal governments. What the reforms would not have done, however, was grant the councils the autonomy they now lack. The councils might indeed "empower" people to challenge state and local governments, yet the councils themselves would still rely on the president for official recognition and funding. Consequently, the transfer of power from state and local governments "to the people" would have been, to a large extent, just another transfer of power to the president.

The biggest challenge facing the Bolivarian movement, López Maya says toward the end of her book, is how to transcend its most important asset: Chávez's charismatic leadership. Wilpert echoes this view, observing that "the movement's dependence on Chávez and his charisma reproduces some of the worst aspects of the previous regime that the move-

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ment set out to overcome," such as clientelism and corruption. The referendum may have been a crucial step toward breaking that dependency, especially since Chávez himself chose to frame it as a referendum on his leadership. He lumped the diverse, complex and contentious proposals into a single package and then campaigned under the slogan "Whoever votes 'yes' is voting for Chávez, and whoever votes 'no' is voting for George W. Bush."

The referendum lost not because Chávez isn't still popular but because millions of his supporters rejected—or were simply unmoved by—this formula. Many who are happy to have Chávez as their president were uncomfortable with giving him more power. As one Chávez supporter told the *Washington Post*: "He wants a blank check, and that's impossible."

The referendum also failed because the government's efforts to demonize its opponents fell flat. In the past, it was easy for Chávez to attack the opposition as undemocratic coup-mongers, given that at least some of them had indeed participated in the 2002 coup. But this time the "no" campaign was led largely by figures immune to that charge: university students who were teenagers in 2002, as well as Chávez's former defense minister, Raúl Isaías Baduel, and former wife, Marisabel Rodríguez, both of whom played key roles in restoring him to power during the coup. It would seem that the distorting impact of the 2002 coup on Venezuelan politics, like that of 9/11 on US politics, is finally beginning to wane.

The referendum result was, in short, a defeat for the with-me-or-with-the-enemy mindset that, whatever its historic justification, is anathema to pluralism. It was also a defeat for the equally insidious mindset that equates power to the president with power to the people. If the defeat helps propel the Bolivarian movement beyond these limits, it could prove to be a major boon for those seeking to promote a more genuinely participatory democracy in Venezuela.

Whether Chávez is ready to move in that direction is an open question. He has called for a period of "revision, rectification and relaunching" of the revolution but insists that he will still pursue all the rejected reforms—including, especially, the removal of presidential term limits. He has declared that the Bolivarian Revolution should tolerate diverse political "currents" but continues with his zero-sum approach to national politics, warning his supporters that should they lose the regional elections later this year, "the next step will be war" and a return to "the April 11 framework."

The political cost of the referendum, meanwhile, has only been compounded by the widespread perception, even among Chavistas, that the government has failed to curb rampant corruption and violent crime, while its much-touted social programs have fallen significantly short of their promise. The health and education missions "have all been deteriorating in the past year," Wilpert recently reported on his website. And there have been severe shortages of milk and the subsidized basic foodstuffs that the government distributes largely through its Mercal mission, a network of state-run markets and cooperatives concentrated in poor communities.

On my last trip to Caracas, I came across a Mercal market with a revolutionary slogan emblazoned on its outer wall: Con Chávez Todo, Sin Chávez Plomo. With Chávez everything, without Chávez lead (in Spanish, *plomo*, or "lead," is slang for bullets). Like so much else in Venezuela today, it's hard to know for sure what to make of this message. Was it no more than a bit of bravado, reflecting the idealistic fervor and bunker mentality of a moment that may have already passed? Or could it be an omen of darker days to come? The fact that the shelves inside these Mercal markets are increasingly bare only feeds the uncertainty about where the country's Bolivarian experiment is headed. ■

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New York's Rockefeller Drug War

■ "The Human and Fiscal Price We All Pay." Co-sponsored by the New York Society for Ethical Culture and the Women's City Club of New York. Thursday, March 6; doors at 6:30 PM, program at 7. The New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West Sixty-Fourth Street at Central Park West. Free admission. For information, contact Caitlin Dunklee, Drop the Rock coordinator, at (212) 254-5700, ext. 339, or cdunklee@correctionalassociation.org. Panel members: David Soares, Albany County district attorney; Robert Gangi, executive director of the Correctional Association of New York; a community activist directly affected by the Rockefeller Drug Laws; and State Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry, chairman of the Committee on Corrections. Moderator: Gloria Browne-Marshall, author of *Race, Law and American Society 1607-Present* and assistant professor at John Jay College. Attendees will learn about the impact of the harsh, ineffective and racially biased statutes, as well as current strategies for promoting repeal. This forum spotlights 2008 as the thirty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the drug laws. Organizers from Drop the Rock will speak about becoming involved in the campaign.

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The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Fourteen Little Words

by VICTOR NAVASKY

Freedom for the Thought That We Hate
A Biography of the First Amendment.
By Anthony Lewis.
Basic Books. 221 pp. $25.

When I was a first-year student at the Yale Law School in 1956, I was deeply impressed when my torts professor, Fleming James Jr., to underline his point that in the old days one could be imprisoned for seditious libel (even if what one wrote was the truth), quoted I-don't-know-who, saying:

> Then up rose Lord Mansfield.
> He spake like the Bible.
> "The greater the truth, sir
> The greater the libel!"

As Anthony Lewis makes clear in his elegant new book, *Freedom for the Thought That We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment*, those days are gone forever. Although his approach is not legalistic, he thoroughly discusses the great libel cases, like *Near v. Minnesota*, which in 1925 established the principle that the First Amendment protects the press from prior governmental restraints on publication, and *New York Times v. Sullivan*, which in 1964 extended the principle of First Amendment protection to include subsequent-to-publication punishment (even if what one wrote was false—unless there was reckless disregard for the truth).

Lewis, who formerly from his perch on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* and currently as a contributor to *The New York Review of Books* has proved himself to be one of the most vigilant members of the commentariat on behalf of First Amendment values, is the bearer of glad tidings. Less a sounding of the alarm than a chiming of the liberty bell, his message is eloquent and clear. Despite the Bush Administration's much-publicized assault on First Amendment values, "I am convinced, that the fundamental American commitment to free speech, is no longer in doubt."

Although Lewis is unsparing in his inventory of this country's various significant pre- and post-9/11 wounds to constitutional liberty, his argument is, in effect, that almost every time the government (or would-be private censors, for that matter) has crossed the free-speech line, history has pushed back. And why, he implicitly asks, should this time be any different? His faith is not undocumented. Even though his book is less a systematic "case for" than a compelling and lucid celebration of those fourteen little words ("Congress shall make no law… abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press"), his point is taken: "Again and again in American history," he writes, "the public has been told that civil liberties must be sacrificed to protect the country from foreign threats"; yet again and again liberty denied has been followed by liberty restored.

By way of example, he tells us:

§ In 1798 Congress passed a bill making seditious libel a federal crime, punishable by fines of up to $2,000 and imprisonment for up to two years. (The law was said to be needed to protect the country from terrorism—French terrorism, no less, the fear being that the Jacobins would export guillotine justice!) On March 3, 1801, Congress allowed the law to expire.

§ In 1917 Congress passed the Espionage Act, and in 1918 the Sedition Act. They were followed by the infamous Palmer Raids and other instances of radicals getting rounded up in blatant violation of due process. Sauerkraut was rechristened "liberty cabbage," and Eugene Debs, leader of the Socialist Party and five-time candidate for President, was convicted for a speech he made opposing conscription and World War I and sentenced to ten years in prison (from where he again ran for President). Three years later President Harding pardoned Debs, and by that time Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who had voted with the majority for Debs's conviction, had restated his "clear and present danger" test (adding the crucial adjective "imminent") and written a powerful dissent in *Abrams v. United States*. The defendants in that case were charged under the Espionage Act with printing leaflets intended to hurt the war against Germany. ("I believe the defendants had as much right to publish," Holmes wrote, "as the Government has to publish the Constitution of the United States now vainly invoked by them.") Eventually his "imminent danger" test would become the law.

§ In 1944 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered the internment of all Japanese-Americans in relocation camps solely because of their ethnicity. In 1976 President Ford called the relocation of the Japanese "a sad day in American history," and twelve years later, President Reagan signed into law an act of Congress providing compensation for the survivors of the relocation program.

§ In the late 1940s and early '50s the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Senate Internal Security Committee, along with Joe McCarthy and various other investigators intent on purging the Red Menace from our movies, our schools, our churches, our government and our mili-

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tary, were riding high and riding roughshod over the First Amendment rights of reluctant witnesses. By the mid '50s Senator McCarthy had been censured by his colleagues, and by the late '70s HUAC and SISC were no longer in business. In a series of rulings the Warren Court (with Justices Hugo Black, William Douglas and William Brennan being its most articulate First Amendment elaborators) had reminded the country of what Lewis calls the Madisonian Premise—the right to dissent—which later informed the Court's opinion in the Pentagon Papers case (and which most recently the *New York Times* invoked as the basis for disclosing secret and illegal Bush Administration wiretapping without warrants).

Nor is Lewis content to describe and predict. Like many prophets he also seems to feel the need to exhort, either in his own words or in those of others. Thus: "The highest duty of the press [is] to inform the public about its governors," he writes, because, as James Madison himself put it, the people are sovereign; and as Justice Louis Brandeis wrote in 1927 in his dissent to *Whitney v. California*, in which the Court upheld the conviction of Anita Whitney for her role in establishing the Communist Party in California: "Discussion affords ordinarily adequate protection against the dissemination of noxious doctrine.... The fitting remedy for evil counsels is good ones."

Moreover, Lewis urges the press to follow the injunction of the British columnist Bernard Levin of *The Times* of London, who in the 1980s dismissed the idea that the press's obligation was to be "responsible" (in the English sense of commitment to the ideas and assumptions of the ruling class). "The press," he wrote, "has no duty to be responsible at all, and it will be an ill day for freedom if it should ever acquire one.... We are and must remain vagabonds and outlaws"—we must continue "the pursuit of knowledge that others would like unpursued and the making of comments that others would prefer unmade."

As it happens, for me Lewis's credibility as an observer is enhanced by the fact that he does not number himself among the so-called First Amendment absolutists, like Justice Douglas. Rather, Lewis is a self-described balancer who finds that freedom of expression is often in tension with other values—the right to a fair trial, campaign finance reform, the right to privacy, the need to deal with hate speech and hard-core pornography and such. Whereas Justice Douglas, with whose view, I confess, I perhaps naïvely identify, considered the idea "that First Amendment rights are to be balanced against other needs or conveniences of government" to be "amazing," Lewis believes with the late Justice Potter Stewart (and most sophisticated contemporary Court watchers) that freedom of the press is not an absolute; it "must give way under the Constitution to a paramount public interest in the fair administration of justice."

Here I might add that along the way Lewis does not shy away from issuing opinions of his own: Thus, "The Minnesota decision [*Republican Party of Minnesota v. White*, which overturned a law forbidding candidates for judgeships to announce their views on legal or political issues] seems to me an egregious misapplication of the First Amendment." On speech codes he seems to agree with *The Economist* that "the big danger is that, in the name of stopping bigots, one may end up by stopping all criticism." He adds that "one of the arguments for allowing hateful speech is that it makes the rest of us aware of terrible beliefs [like Holocaust denial] and strengthens our resolve to combat them." Lewis concedes, however, that "in an age when words inspired acts of mass murder and terrorism, it is not as easy for me as it once was to believe that the only remedy for evil counsels, in Brandeis's phrase, should be good ones." He adds, "I think we should be able to punish speech that urges terrorist violence to an audience some of whose members are ready to act on the urging."

Anthony Lewis does not count himself among the so-called First Amendment absolutists.

As a former newspaper man, Lewis tackles the knotty conflict between freedom of the press and protection of confidential sources. Are shield laws, which are meant to provide a journalist with the right to refuse to testify about who provided information gathered during the course of writing an article, the answer for journalists who would protect their sources? Mr. Justice Lewis believes that "the chance that [the Supreme Court] will read the First Amendment to give journalists a testimonial privilege is zero." Nevertheless, he does not believe that shield laws are the answer. The Lewis solution when journalists refuse to reveal their sources: Don't put them in jail (as was done to the *Times*'s Judith Miller), just have judges tell jurors to assume no source.

Given the press's abysmal performance in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, is Lewis's confidence that in the long run free speech will prevail justified? And what about the middle run? Lewis seems to see the press's submissive stance post-9/11 as an atavistic rally-round-the-flag-in-times-of-trouble response, this time reinforced by right-wing intimidation and a natural desire not to appear unpatriotic. It will, he presumably believes, ebb with time, if not with a change of administration.

Well, Lewis has history—or a part of history—on his side. But in trying to project the longer-term prospects for the health of the First Amendment and free-speech values that animate it, I worry that he gives short shrift to the long-term consequences of the Bush Administration's successful action. For example, its packing the Supreme Court (and lower federal courts) with a cadre of younger conservatives who are putting in place precedents that could undermine the First Amendment, not to mention other parts of the Bill of Rights, for decades to come.

In the 1920s, the constitutional scholar Zachariah Chafee Jr. identified the two free-speech interests the First Amendment is meant to protect: a personal interest in self-expression (the right of individuals to set forth their opinions on matters of vital interest, if life is to be worth living) and a social interest in the attainment of truth (which Holmes famously described as "the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market").

Lewis is fairly persuasive when he argues that, by and large, the courts have reflected the deeply embedded Madisonian view on the importance of safeguarding the right of citizens to express themselves. But on the second interest—the need for a competition of ideas, a diversity of opinions—I wish he had given more space and attention to those like Ben Bagdikian, Robert McChesney and Bill Moyers, who argue that media concentration has put in place a structure that functions to exclude alternative, diverse and radical opinions, ideas and assumptions. There is a vast literature here—ranging from radical analysts like Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman to moderate liberal humanists like Lee Bollinger (who argues that for ideological diversity to flourish in electronic media there must be federal regulation, a position at odds with recent rulings of the FCC and long-term friends of deregulation and the Murdochization of the media).

Lewis gives no shrift at all to the concerns of those like the lawyer-scholar Lawrence Lessig, who has reminded us how corporate

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interests have impinged on the free flow of ideas—how as a result of changing law, new technology and concentrated markets, "never in our history have fewer had a legal right to control more of the development of our culture than now." The Copyright Act of 1790 took a restrictive view of intellectual property and emphasized the importance of free expression and the public domain. For the first 120 years of this Republic, the copyright term was extended once, to twenty-eight years from fourteen, the effect being the continued enforcement of copyright as a limited monopoly. In the past four decades, powerful media conglomerates seeking to monopolize lucrative properties have extended it eleven times, with the term of protection now being the life of the author plus seventy years, which is effectively a lifetime monopoly!

At a moment when too many Americans are either ignorant of or choose to underestimate the critical importance of constitutionally protected freedom of speech to our country and our culture, Anthony Lewis's book makes an invaluable contribution to our incomplete national conversation. But that should be the beginning rather than the end of the story. A.J. Liebling famously said that freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one. In the world of Big Media, owners are corporations; the courts to the contrary notwithstanding, these (mega) corporations are not people, and their ability not merely to survive in the marketplace but to dominate it has less to do with having better ideas than with a better-looking bottom line. The threat this poses to our No. 1 Amendment should not be ignored.

We have indeed come a long way from the days when it could be said, "The greater the truth, sir/The greater the libel!" Freedom for the thought that we hate may be, as Lewis suggests, here to stay; but freedom of thought per se will be compromised if First Amendment values are diminished or replaced by corporate ones. ■

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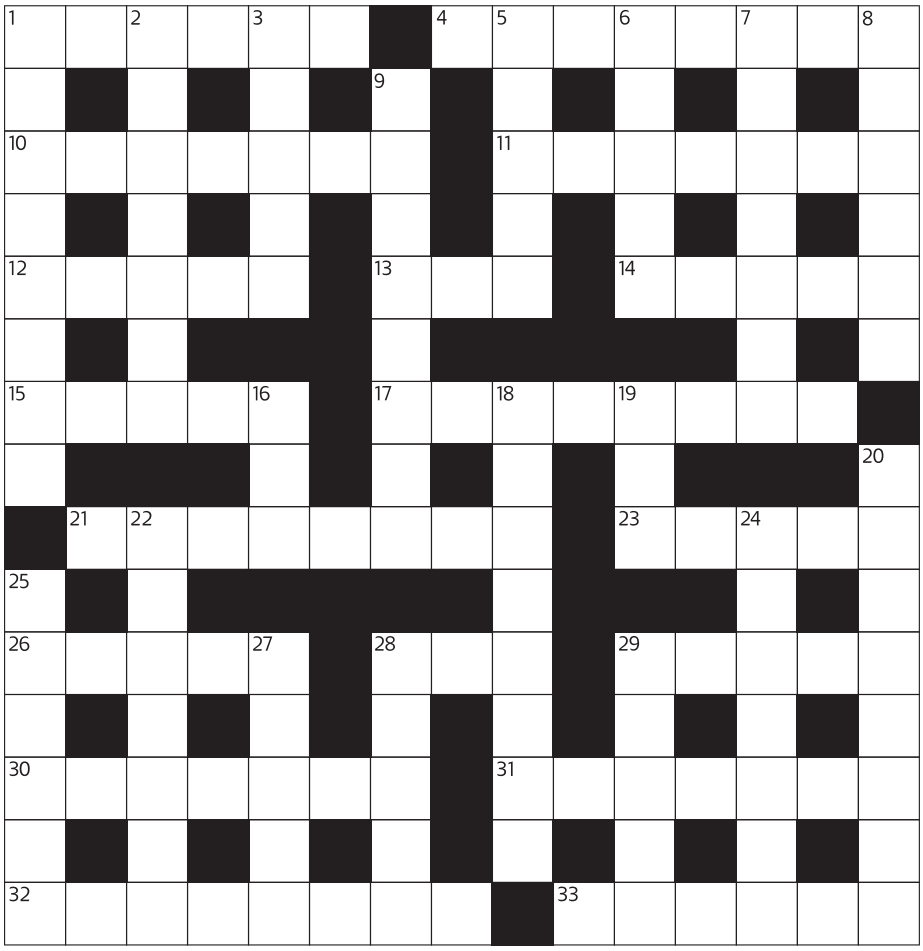

ACROSS

1 One might draw them if feeling lucky, but to a point, they return as disfigurations. (6)

4 See 27 down

10 Concerning poetry, you expect to go back to do it. (7)

11 One of those infantry rollers. (7)

12 So-called because you keep looking at it to see if you can squeeze in that chore? (5)

13 Sort of sad announcements, but they might have something to offer. (3)

14 I want badly to be a good writer! (5)

15 To the French spoken in Paris, it's just a record examination. (5)

17 Were such celebrations very noisy with "shouting" in classical manner, even though it suggests a slaughter of sheep might be involved? (8)

21 If you're old enough to remember Alphonse and Gaston, such a polite remark would be natural, but you wouldn't want the police so. (5,3)

23 It takes just two short lines, one over the other, to imply you want something so. (5)

26, 28 and **29** Writers and musicians get credit for such, but often we can't remember the first while the last is unforgettable. (5,3,5)

30 See 3 down

31 Such a party was given when the possibly innocent was seized by the mob. (7)

32 Diana, for example, suggests she had a Gothic hairdo. (8)

33 Those cute little fellers take a melancholy snooze on return. (6)

DOWN

1 One of Dorothy's friends typifies a person whose importance is only nominal, when skin imperfections arise on a person. (5,3)

2 Fixed firmly, despite appearing to tear apart Mr. Kennedy, possibly. (7)

3, 16 and **30** across If so, the effort seems justified. (5,3,7)

5 A onetime White House pet makes a big hit, obviously. (5)

6 To make a brief note around is to furnish some support. (5)

7 Enveloped by noise, said confusedly, "You might turn up the nose with this." (7)

8 The little Spaniard who blew in "on line" otherwise. (2,4)

9 Dopey gag? It's a method of instruction, when given properly. (8)

16 See 3

18 A nice thing for breakfast, and otherwise a model in profusion. (8)

19 Jewels, as they say, could be nice—but pointless. (3)

20 With the Southern capital to need emergency rooms shortly, they don't do their job. (8)

22 Lonely and sad, because of Miss Doone losing an article? (7)

24 Posed in possibly nude circumstances, but not satisfied with it. (7)

25 Used to be applied in the woodshed, as an abrupt change. (6)

27 and **4** across Implying benchwork never deserves a nip by comparison. (5,2,1,5)

28 Helps in the crime, like what might be placed inside. (5)

29 A short state with only half the dance involved, good for a drink. (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3117

P	I	P	E	D	R	E	A	M		S	H	I	F	T
I		L		O		V		O		T		N		U
A	S	A	R	U	L	E		A	N	O	T	H	E	R
N		C		B		R		N		P		E		B
O	N	E		L	U	M	B	E	R		T	R	I	O
		B		E		O		D		S		I		J
G	O	O	D	T	U	R	N		S	T	A	T	U	E
R				A		E		D		E				T
A	L	A	S	K	A		H	E	L	P	I	N	G	S
V		N		E		V		S		H		A		
E	X	A	M		R	E	V	E	R	E		M	A	B
Y		L		H		S		R		N		E		U
A	N	I	M	A	L	S		V	I	S	I	T	O	R
R		N		N		E		E		O		A		S
D	R	E	A	D		L	A	S	T	N	I	G	H	T

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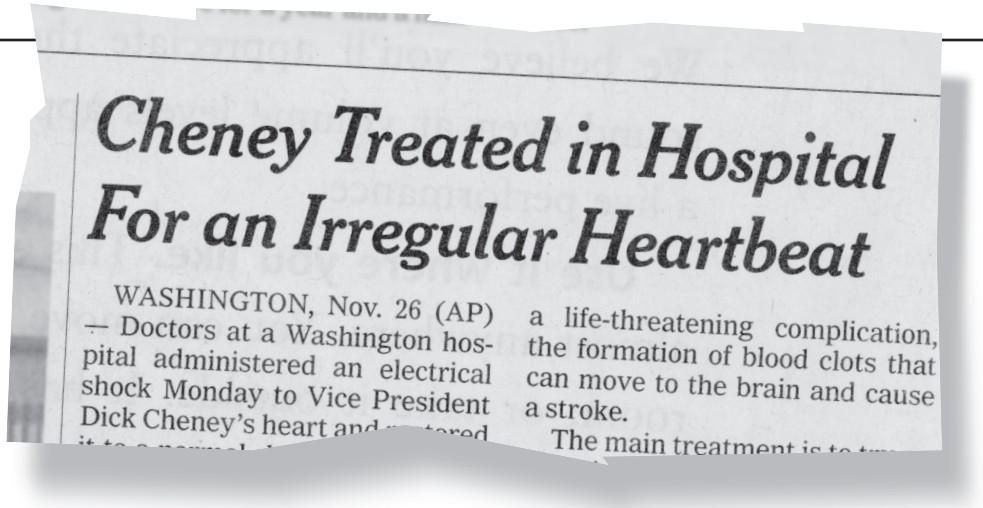

Cheney Treated in Hospital For an Irregular Heartbeat

WASHINGTON, Nov. 26 (AP) — Doctors at a Washington hospital administered an electrical shock Monday to Vice President Dick Cheney's heart and [illegible] it to a normal [illegible]

a life-threatening complication, the formation of blood clots that can move to the brain and cause a stroke.

The main treatment is to [illegible]

If he were anyone else, he'd probably be dead by now.

The patient's history and prognosis were grim: four heart attacks, quadruple bypass surgery, angioplasty, an implanted defibrillator and now an emergency procedure to treat an irregular heartbeat.

For millions of Americans, this might be a death sentence. For the vice president, it was just another medical treatment. And it cost him very little.

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